

**An Ecclesiological Discussion of the Recent History of the
Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA) 1989-2005.**

By

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DECLARATION

I, Owen Yazengankharo Mkandawire, declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being submitted for the degree of master of Theology in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

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As the candidate's Supervisor I have approved this dissertation/thesis for submission

Signed----- Date: -----

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Abstract

The Baptist Convention of Malawi is a congregational church believing in the autonomy of the local church and the priesthood of all believers among others. This can be traced to the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century, whose beliefs have shaped the modern Baptists worldwide. The church does not have a hierarchical structure. Pastors do not exercise authority over members. The church, not a selected few, is the final authority. Each congregation is self-supporting.

When the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) missionaries came to Malawi in 1959, they established this polity without any alteration. This study explores how the Baptist ecclesiology influenced some pastors to leave the Baptist Convention of Malawi. The study argued that some members of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA) have misunderstood and exploited the concepts of autonomy and the priesthood of all believers. Independence has been emphasised at the expense of interdependence. Since each local church is autonomous, there is the tendency among some pastors not to abide by the decision made by the BACOMA Annual General Meeting (AGM). The study further argues that since Baptist pastors are not transferred from one parish to another, some pastors, who in most cases are the founders of the local congregations and minister in their home areas, begin to exercise power like “chiefs.” This in turn creates tensions between the pastor and the members who ought to be the final authority. Furthermore, in Baptist tradition, being a pastor is regarded primarily as a call from God. Education, both theological as well as secular, is not a determining factor. The study therefore asserts that from the beginning, the SBC missionaries did not establish well trained and equipped Malawian leadership. Most of the pastors who were trained at the Bible School did not go beyond primary level. The missionaries continued training these pastors who could hardly handle crucial administrative matters. The study concludes that while still maintaining the Baptist polity, BACOMA should redefine its relationship with the SBC, embark on a training programme in financial management for its members, improve the quality of education for its pastors and if possible, from time to time transfer pastors from one congregation to the other.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my dear wife Esnat, our three children Uchizi, Uchindami and Urunji who endured the pain of my absence.

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Abbreviations

AABF	All African Baptist Fellowship
ABK	Afrikaanse Baptiste Kerk
ANC	African National Congress
APIM	Achewa Providence Industrial Mission
BACOMA	Baptist Convention of Malawi
BASA	Baptist Association of South Africa
BCSA	Baptist Convention of South Africa
BCZ	Baptist Convention of Zambia
BFZ	Baptist Fellowship of Zambia
BMCA	Baptist Mission in Central Africa
BMIM	Baptist Mission in Malawi
BMZ	Baptist Mission in Zambia
BUCA	Baptist Union of Central Africa
BUSA	Baptist Union of Southern Africa
CCAP	Church of Central Africa Presbyterian
FBCM	Fundamental Baptist Church in Malawi
HMS	Home Missionary Society
IBCM	Indigenous Baptist Convention of Malawi
MBC	Malawi Broadcasting Corporation
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
NIBA	National Indian Baptist Association
NIM	Nyasa Industrial Mission
PIM	Providence Industrial Mission
SACC	South African Council of Churches
TBU	Transkei Baptist Union
UBIA	United Brethren in Action
ZBA	Zambia Baptist Association
ZIM	Zambezi Industrial Mission

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA) was established through missionary work by the Baptist Mission in Central Africa (BMCA) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) from the United States of America (USA). The BMCA later changed its name to Baptist Mission in Malawi (BMIM).¹ The BMCA started its work in Malawi on 30 July 1959.²

The first areas of missionary work were Blantyre and Zomba in the Southern Region of Malawi and Lilongwe in the Central Region.³ The focus of the missionary work was on evangelism and church planting. This led to the conversion of people and their subsequent incorporation into the local churches.⁴ From the onset the policy of the BMIM was not to provide any subsidies to the churches, not to pay salaries to pastors and to create as few institutions as possible.⁵

Ever since the beginning, Malawian Baptists never were part of the BMIM. As missionary work progressed in the 1960s, it became evident that Baptist missionaries and Malawians were one in faith but different in policy. Some American missionaries, notably Leroy Albright, sympathised with Malawians. They encouraged Malawians to form their own body.⁶ BACOMA was officially formed on 26th May 1972.⁷

All BACOMA churches are autonomous. The system was established by the BMIM according to the Baptist polity world wide.⁸ The emphasis was on the “independence” of the

¹ The Baptist Mission in Central Africa came from Gweru, Zimbabwe. After Malawi became independent in 1964, the name was changed to Baptist Mission in Malawi (BMIM).

² Saunders, D.L. 1973. A History of the Baptists in East and Central Africa. PhD. Thesis. Louisville: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. P. 122.

³ Malawi is divided into three administrative regions: the Northern Region, the Central Region and the Southern Region.

⁴ Day, R. 2004. Southern Baptist Missionaries in Malawi: Who are they? *Religion in Malawi* 11: 29.

⁵ Caithen, B.J. and Means, F.K. 1981. *Advance to Bold Mission Thrust: A History of Southern Baptist Missions*. Richmond: Foreign Mission Board. P. 164.

⁶ Longwe, H.H. 2000. Identity by Dissociation: The first Group to Secede from Chilembwe's Church: A History of Peter Kalemba and the Achewa Providence Industrial Mission. MTh. Thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi. Pp. 84-86.

⁷ BACOMA EC minutes. 26 May 1972. Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi (BTSM) archives.

⁸ On Baptist polity see McBeth, H.L. 1987. *The Baptist Heritage*. Nashville: Broadman Press. Pp. 69-90.

local church and on “self-supporting”. The calling, maintenance and firing of a pastor was, and still is, under the jurisdiction of the local church not the BACOMA Executive Committee (EC) or the secretariat. BACOMA EC is involved in the affairs of the local church only in terms of conflict resolution, leadership training, distribution of relief items and other issues.

Since its formation, BACOMA has been facing several challenges in handling its pastors. There was a conflict in 1989 which nearly split BACOMA into two conventions.⁹ In 1992 pastor Samuel Malabwanya, who had been the general secretary for eight years, and an executive member for twelve years seceded from BACOMA.¹⁰ Between the year 2000 and 2004 three pastors left BACOMA. These were Thomas Kachasu Gama who was once the general secretary of BACOMA, Samuel Joseph Chilokoteni who was at one point the Baptist chaplain at the Mozambican refugee camp in Ntcheu, in central Malawi and a home missionary in northern Malawi and Amos Rhobo. Another serious conflict occurred at Zomba Baptist church in 2005 when an African-American, Anthony Bell, was the pastor.¹¹ Some church members follow these pastors to their new churches. Some leave the Baptist church and join other denominations.¹² The study focuses on these five pastors. All of them come from the Southern Region of Malawi.

The aim of this research is to investigate how the Baptist ecclesiology contributes to pastors leaving the Baptist Convention of Malawi.

1.2 Limitations

Many members and pastors have left BACOMA since its foundation in 1972. But this research focuses on five pastors in a specific region, being the southern part of Malawi, where the BMIM began its work, and in two districts; Blantyre and Zomba.¹³ The study focuses on Baptist ecclesiology and how it is understood.

⁹ In Baptist tradition, an association is a fellowship of churches at district or county level while a convention is a fellowship of churches at a national or in some countries, at a state or provincial level.

¹⁰ Samuel Malabwanya. 1993. to Fletcher Kaiya.

¹¹ Anthony Bell did not secede from BACOMA, but the conflict created two opposing and hostile camps within the church.

¹² Some of the pastors that have left BACOMA recently include: Sonny Gunya in 2002. He joined the Zambezi Evangelical Church, Pastor Butao in 2004. He is pasturing a Baptist church which is not affiliated to BACOMA. Pastor Rutherford Banda left BACOMA in 2006 and founded his own ministry called the Grace (Baptist) Ministry and Pastor Kalonga in 2008. Pastors Simango and Godfrey Chimwenje were suspended from the ministry in 2005 and 2007 respectively.

¹³ Zomba is a single district with the largest number of associations in BACOMA. It has eight.

Another limiting factor is that the person conducting this research is a Baptist. Therefore, the results might be biased in one way or the other. However, the research has tried as much as possible to be critical and follow a non-partisan approach.

1.3 Hypotheses

The first hypothesis of this study is that some members of BACOMA have misunderstood and exploited the concepts of autonomy and the priesthood of all believers. Instead of enhancing “standing together” the emphasis has been on “standing alone”. Thus there has been a persistent struggle for power and intense insistence on independence.

Another hypothesis is that from the beginning, the BMIM did not establish well trained and equipped Malawian leadership. Most of the pastors who were trained at the then Baptist Bible School did not go beyond primary level (grade 8 according to Malawi’s educational system). Such pastors have a shallow understanding of the word of God and can hardly handle crucial administrative matters. Hence lack of sound leadership contributed to the schisms.

1.4 Theoretical framework

The structure of the Baptist church is fluid in the sense that there is no hierarchy of pastors exercising authority over members. The church is congregational with a belief in the priesthood of all believers, a belief that dates back to the days of the Anabaptists. Though this Anabaptist heritage exists, it must be noted that the Baptist ecclesiology is more influenced by Congregationalism than the Anabaptism. In the Baptist ecclesiology, there is no hierarchical structure. Each congregation is self-supporting. Autonomy of the local church is its cherished principle.¹⁴ The church, not a selected few, is the final authority. With this diversity, ecclesiastical disputes are inevitable.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on:

- a. G.C. Oosthuizen’s theory of ecclesiastical disputes. Oosthuizen writes that denominational or ecclesiastical differences are some of the contributing factors that lead to schisms. He cites examples such as discrepant disciplinary measures, misuse

¹⁴ McBeth, H.L. 1987. *The Baptist Heritage*. Nashville: Broadman Press. P. 75.

of church finances, the lack of opportunity given to the laity to lead and many more.¹⁵ In spite of believing in the priesthood of all believers, this study investigates whether the Malawian laity is given the opportunity to lead or whether some pastors behave like “bishops.” The study further explores whether disciplinary cases and financial mismanagement were some of the causes that led to some pastors leaving BACOMA.

- b. The relationship between Western missionaries and African converts. David Barrett’s theory is that in Africa some of the schisms have taken place in mainline churches though there are many other schisms that have broken away from the AICs. This has resulted in the formation of African Instituted or Initiated or Independent Churches (AIC). Barrett is of the opinion that the AICs broke away from the mother churches as a reaction to the mission’s failure to demonstrate the biblical concept of “philadelphia” (brotherly love), the failure to allow converts to assume responsibility, the failure to distinguish between the good and the bad African traditional customs, and the failure of the mission to spot the parallels between African society and the biblical truth.¹⁶ Since BACOMA is an offspring of BMIM, this study examines the extent to which the BMIM-BACOMA relationship contributed to the schisms.
- c. The theory of indigenisation. John McCracken, though he does not write about the Baptists, has written extensively about the impact of the Livingstonia Mission in Northern Malawi.¹⁷ In preparation for the transfer of leadership, the Livingstonia Mission of the Free Church of Scotland trained Malawians in various fields like medicine, technical skills, agriculture, accounts and administration. Further, the missionaries did not establish a “replica” of the Free Church of Scotland in Malawi. Through the efforts of young missionaries like Donald Fraser,¹⁸ they established a church that embraced local flavour. This study therefore analyses how the Baptist missionaries in Malawi approached the concept of indigenisation and to what extent it

¹⁵ Oosthuizen, G.C. 1968. *Post-Christianity in Africa: a theological and anthropological study*. London: SPK. Pp. 209-221. See also Daneel, I.M. 1987. *Quest for Belonging*. Gweru: Mambo Press. Pp. 72-73. Hastings, A. 1971. *Mission and Ministry*. London: SPK. Pp. 208-209.

¹⁶ Barrett, D.B. 1968. *Schisms and Renewal in Africa: an Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Movements*. Nairobi: OUP. p. 157.

¹⁷ McCracken, J. 2000. *Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875-1940: the Impact of Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province*. Blantyre: CLAIM. Pp.171-196; 237-238.

¹⁸ Donald Fraser came to Malawi in 1896. He was influenced by the Keswick Convention which rejected the tendency of missionaries dominating the local people. It laid emphasis on identifying the church with its African environment. See Fraser, D. 1921. The Church and Games in Africa. *International Review of Missions*. 10. 110-117. Quoted in McCracken, J. Ibid. P. 237.

affected the local people's understanding of Baptist ecclesiology. The study further investigates whether the BMIM had any policy of devolution of authority. The study also seeks to explore how prepared Malawians were to run their own organisation. As for theological training, the study seeks to investigate if there are any traces of Daniel Parker's and Alexander Campbell's¹⁹ teachings in BMIM that could have a bearing on Baptist ecclesiology.

1.5 Research Problem and Objectives

The principal objective of this study is to investigate how Baptist ecclesiology contributes to pastors leaving BACOMA and its impact. To arrive at this principal problem, the study focuses on these objectives:

- a. To find out how Baptist ecclesiology is understood in BACOMA
- b. To explore the effectiveness of BACOMA in handling conflict resolutions
- c. To critically examine the relationship between BACOMA and the BMIM and how this relationship contributed to the schisms
- d. To investigate how Baptist members view BACOMA and BMIM
- e. To suggest some recommendations to BACOMA that might be helpful in the running of the organisation

1.6 Research Methodology

This research deals with events which took place a few years ago. Most of the people who witnessed these events are still alive and they have a story to tell. In this vein, data was collected in three categories: through oral interviews, consulting primary written sources in church archives and consulting secondary written sources like books, theses and journals.

1.7 Oral sources

Interviews took the form of interactive conversational narratives. The focus was on acquiring historical knowledge of the past through word of mouth.²⁰ The book *Oral history in a*

¹⁹ Daniel Parker (1781-1844) and Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) were Baptist preachers in America. Among other things, they taught that theological training and paying salaries to pastors were but human inventions which were not sanctioned in the Bible. However, his association with the Baptist Church was limited.

²⁰ Denis, P. ed. 2002. *Orality Memory and the Past: Listening to the Voices of Black Clergy under Colonialism and Apartheid*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications. p. 2. Also see Ritchie, D. 2003. *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*. Oxford: OUP. P. 32.

*wounded country: Interactive Interviewing in South Africa*²¹ provided the needed information about the nature of oral history as “contextual”²² and interactive. The book provided a wide range of insights on how a researcher can do oral history. Some of the guidelines included the need to conduct interviews in the interviewee’s preferred language, that a researcher should be aware of the ethical requirements, how to identify interviewees and the need for a researcher to know the demarcation between being an outsider or an insider in order to maintain critical distance.²³ These tools were applied in the context of BACOMA as I interacted with the interviewees about the past events that affected BACOMA while at the same time paying attention to their responses.

The interview process made use of asking follow up questions. Most of the questions were open ended. Most of the interviewees were pastors and other members of the BACOMA executive committee. Local members of the Baptist church such as the youths and women were also interviewed. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Focus group discussions were also conducted.

1.8 Written sources

Written sources can be divided into two categories: the primary and secondary sources. Primary written sources consisted of letters, minutes of meetings, private correspondence and BACOMA annual general meeting reports.

Secondary written sources included books, journals, theses and BMIM area reports. All these sources were critically interrogated and analysed.

1.9 Literature Review

Very little has been written about the schisms in the Baptist Convention of Malawi except for the PhD thesis by Hany Longwe.²⁴ Longwe writes that pastor Njolomole Phiri, the first

²¹ Denis, P and Ntsimane, R. 2008. eds. *Oral history in a wounded country: Interactive Interviewing in South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press.

²² Denis, P. Introduction. In Denis, P. and Ntsimane, R. 2008. eds. *Oral history in a wounded country: Interactive Interviewing in South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press. P. 1.

²³ Carton, B. and Vis, L. Doing Oral History. In Denis, P and Ntsimane, R. 2008. eds. *Oral history in a wounded country: Interactive Interviewing in South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press. P. 53.

²⁴ Longwe, H.H. 2007. Democratisation of the Christian Faith: The Influence of the Baptist Doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers on the History of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA). PhD. thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi. He is currently the principal of the Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi.

chairperson of BACOMA, was removed from his position in 1980 and was subsequently deprived of his membership in 1981 because he misappropriated funds.²⁵

As for Malabwanya leaving BACOMA, Longwe asserts that he had dictatorial tendencies contrary to the Baptist polity. This did not go well with his colleagues in the EC. Longwe goes on to affirm that BMIM took a unilateral decision to sell trucks without consulting BACOMA. Apart from this, the missionaries used to treat Malawians like second class citizens.²⁶ This annoyed BACOMA EC which eventually led to an open conflict.

This study explores other factors that forced Malabwanya to leave BACOMA. It examines the sour relationship that developed between Malabwanya and Pastor Emmanuel Chinkwita Phiri who was the vice president of BACOMA and the director of the Institute of Church Growth,²⁷ regionalism in BACOMA EC, the constitutionality of the meeting that was called by the Lilongwe Association in 1989²⁸ and the aftermath of the 1992 BACOMA AGM.

Molly Longwe and Rachel NyaGondwe-Banda have also carried out studies on BACOMA. Molly Longwe writes about the Baptist response to the Chewa traditional initiation rites for girls in Lilongwe, in central Malawi. As for Rachel NyaGondwe-Banda, her focus is on the role played by Baptist women in leadership, evangelism and pastoral care in southern Malawi.²⁹

No exclusive research has been done on the other four pastors. This study:

- (a) investigates whether these pastors were at any point disciplined by their churches, and if so how they reacted to the discipline,
- (b) explores their relationship with the churches they pastored before leaving BACOMA,
- (c) examines the type of church government of the churches they joined or formed and

²⁵ Longwe, H.H. 2000 Identity by Dissociation: The first Group to Secede from Chilembwe's Church: A History of Peter Kalemba and the Achewa Providence Industrial Mission. MTh. thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi. P. 102.

²⁶ Longwe, H.H. 2007. Democratisation of the Christian Faith: The Influence of the Baptist Doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers on the History of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA). PhD. thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi. Pp. 381-383.

²⁷ Samuel Malabwanya to Officer in-Charge, Soche Police Station, 18th December 1989. Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi archives, file 2B.

²⁸ N. Mkaka to all pastors, 20th November 1989. Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi archives, file 2B.

²⁹ However, in their studies both mention that the BMIM had different policies contrary to the expectations of Malawians. See Longwe, M. 2006. *Growing up: A Chewa Girls' Initiation*, Zomba: Kachere, Pp32-34; and NyaGondwe-Banda, R. 2005. *Women of Bible and Culture: Baptist Convention Women in Southern Malawi*, Zomba: Kachere. Pp. 20, 76-77.

(d) examines how BACOMA or the local associations handled the conflict.

Similar studies on schisms have been done among the Baptists in the neighbouring countries of Zambia and South Africa. In Zambia, Reinhard Ludwig Frey writes that maladministration by the general secretary of the Zambian Baptist Association (ZBA) contributed to the split which led to the formation of the Free Baptist Church of Zambia in 1991.³⁰ Furthermore, conflicts between the Baptist Mission in Zambia (BMZ) and the Baptist Convention of Zambia (BCZ) led to the formation of the Baptist Fellowship of Zambia (BFZ) in 1995.³¹

In South Africa, Humphrey Moroka Mogashoa argues that among other reasons, the financial stand of a church as a criterion for joining the Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BUSA) which was, and still is dominated by white Baptists, led to the formation of the Baptist Convention of South Africa in 1987.³² But Louise Kretzschmar emphasises that the issue of race and ethnic division contributed to the strained relationship between the BUSA and the black Transkei Baptist Union (TBU) in 1981.³³ In the end the TBU seceded from BUSA and became an autonomous body. This study makes comparisons and contrasts between the schisms in these two countries with those in Malawi.

1.9.1 Motivation

I attended the BACOMA annual general assembly in Lilongwe in August 1995. It was revealed that one of the first pastors, Chimombo of Kasungu, was sick and needed assistance. I learnt with shock for the first time that Baptist pastors do not have a fixed salary nor pension scheme. Some of them did not receive any salary.³⁴ Each pastor was at the mercy of the church that he pastored. The general assembly set up an ad hoc committee which was

³⁰Frey, R.L. 2005. The History of the Zambian Baptist Association 1905-2005. PhD dissertation. Zomba: University of Malawi. P. 275.

³¹<http://www.kabwatabaptistchurch.org/> accessed on 4th April, 2008.

³² Mogashoa, H.M. 1998. Institutionalised segregation: an overview of the Black Baptist Clergy's seclusion from Mainstream Power Structures 1859-1988. *Studia Historicae Ecclesisticae* XXIV. P. 55. See also Mogashoa, H.M. 2004. South African Baptists and finance matters (1820-1948). PhD. thesis. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal; Mogashoa, H. M. 1995. A Critical Study of the Life and Work of Rev. W. Duma 1907-1977 as a contribution to the History of the Baptist Church in Southern Africa. MTh. thesis. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal. P.77 and P. 91.

³³ Kretzschmar, L. 1992. The Privatisation of the Christian faith Among South African Baptists: With particular Reference to its nature, extent, causes and consequences. PhD thesis. Cape Town: University of Cape Town. P. 210.

³⁴ From 2002-2004, I was working for the Malawi Revenue Authority (MRA) at the Mwanza Border Post. Mwanza Baptist Church was not paying its pastor. My wife and I had to motivate the church to start supporting the pastor.

mandated to look into the challenges that the pastors faced in BACOMA and come up with recommendations. I was privileged to be appointed as the secretary of the committee. During the course of our investigation, I was informed that pastor Malabwanya had messed up things in BACOMA even though he was such a talented pastor, teacher and preacher. I got mixed information. Some people were of the opinion that his departure was good for BACOMA while others sympathised with him. Since that day my curiosity deepened each day to find out why some pastors leave BACOMA.

Chapter Two

Baptist Roots and Beliefs

2.1 Introduction

This chapter traces the roots and beliefs of the Baptists. In order to appreciate these roots, the chapter briefly explores the origin and beliefs of the Anabaptists. For the sake of this thesis, special attention is paid to their ecclesiology and how the Anabaptists influenced both the English Separatists³⁵ and the English Baptists. The chapter proceeds by exploring the factors that led to the development of the Southern Baptist Convention which extended its missionary work to Malawi in 1959.

2.2 The Anabaptists

The Anabaptists made a radical departure from the Reformers. They started in Zurich as a splinter group from a church led by Ulrich Zwingli in 1525.³⁶ Zwingli preferred a gradual reform of the church. He waited for the city council to pass laws to implement religious changes. But the Anabaptists wanted a rapid reform of the church without adhering to any symbol of Roman Catholicism.³⁷ The group was led by Conrad Grebel, George Blaurock and Felix Manz. In 1524 they gathered some faithful followers and started studying the Bible. They came to the conclusion that infant baptism was not scripturally justifiable.³⁸ They argued that baptism should be administered to adults who freely believed the gospel. In a public debate, though Zwingli's arguments were not scripturally accurate, the city council sided with him. As a result of this, they were banished or imprisoned. On 21 January 1525, George Blaurock asked Grebel to baptise him. Then Blaurock baptised the rest.³⁹ Since they re-baptised believers upon their confession of faith, their opponents called them "Anabaptists" meaning those who re-baptise.

³⁵ The English Baptist emerged from the Separatists, a non-conformist group within the Church of England.

³⁶ Hillerbrand, H. J. 2000. *Historical Dictionary of the Reformation and Counter Reformation*. Maryland: The Scarecrow Press. Pp.4-5. See also Hillerbrand, H. J. ed 1996. *Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Reformation*. Vol. 1. Oxford. OUP. P. 31.

³⁷ Manschreck, CL. 1974. *A History of Christianity in the World: from Persecution to Uncertainty*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall. P. 209.

³⁸ Livingstone, E.A. ed *Oxford Concise Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford. OUP. P. 20.

³⁹ Ibid. P. 209.

Since their teachings were unorthodox, the Anabaptists were persecuted by both the Protestants and the Roman Catholics.⁴⁰ They endangered the union of the church and the state. Even pacifism was considered as sedition. Hence they were regarded as subversive. They were either burnt at the stake, drowned or beheaded. They were scattered all over Europe. Three of the major groups were the Swiss Brethren in Switzerland and Germany, the Mennonites in Holland⁴¹ and the Hutterites in Moravia.

2.3 Their beliefs

The Anabaptists believed that personal faith in and commitment to Christ was essential to salvation and prerequisite to baptism.⁴² They pledged to separate themselves from the world as true believers of Christ. To them Christendom was not equated to Christianity and the church constituted a community of believers who have professed their faith in Christ. All members were believers, a family of faith based on the New Testament. Decision making was to be taken by the entire membership. Thus the Anabaptists did not recognise organised ecclesiastical authority to control them. Even in matters of discipline, believers were to act corporally.⁴³ They were the first to come up with the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and the autonomy of the local church.

The Anabaptists also valued scriptures as the centre of the Christian life. In deciding matters of doctrine, the authority of the scripture formed the basis of doctrine. Thus they were “Biblicists.”⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Estep, W.R 1986. *Renaissance and Reformation*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. P. 186.

⁴¹ In what is Germany today, one of the first members of Anabaptism was Melchior Hofmann. Among scholars, there is opinion that Anabaptism developed simultaneously in Switzerland and Southern Germany. But after the Müntzer tragedy in 1535 Simon Menno reorganised the group. From him comes the name Mennonites. Jan Matthis, a wayward Anabaptist, gathered his disciples and seized Müntzer in 1534 and established a militant communistic regime that lasted for a year. They believed that the Parousia was at hand. They were defeated in 1535. After the defeat of these fanatics, the name Anabaptist was tainted. It was misunderstood because of the confusion in the use of the terms Anabaptists, Inspirationists, Rationalists and Libertines. For the Inspirationists, like Thomas Muntzer, the Spirit took precedence over the Bible. Most Rationalists were anti-trinitarianists. But all of them were against infant baptism and were classified under the term “Radical Reformers.” But for the Anabaptists, they insisted on the restoration of the visible church patterned after the New Testament. See Wilbur, E.M. 1954. *A History of Unitarianism, Socinianism and its Antecedents*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press; Estep, W.R 1987. *The Anabaptist Story*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company.

⁴² Estep, W.R 1987. *The Anabaptist Story*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. P. 11.

⁴³ *Lion Handbook: History of Christianity*. 1980. Hert: Lion Publication. P. 401.

⁴⁴ Janz, D.R. ed. 2007. *A People's History of Christianity: Reformation and Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. P. 208.

The Anabaptists could not take oaths, defend themselves against their persecutors or serve as magistrates.⁴⁵ They were not against the state authority. Their position was that a Christian should not be involved in judicial-political affairs of the state. The world in which they lived was dominated by the medieval framework of the Holy Roman Empire where church and state were one. This is the reason they were regarded as dangerous to the well being of the society.⁴⁶ In the Bern Disputation of 1538 they clearly stated their case:

...we grant that state authorities have a legitimate place, to keep order...and protect the good. But we as Christians live according to the Gospel...Christians consequently do not use the sword which is worldly, but they use the Christian ban.⁴⁷

The position of the Anabaptists was that Christians were “free, unforced and uncompelled people. Faith was a free gift of God and the authorities exceeded their competence when they championed the word of God with a fist.”⁴⁸ The Anabaptists were therefore the first to come up with the doctrine of the separation of the church and the state though it has passed through several transformations with the passing of time.

2.4 Anabaptist-Baptist relationship

Having looked at the roots and beliefs of the Anabaptists, another important point worth finding out is the relationship between the Anabaptists and the Baptists. The Anabaptist-Baptist relationship has ignited exciting debate among scholars. Winthrop P. Hudson is of the view that Thomas Helwys, who established the first Baptist church in England in 1611, repudiated all Anabaptist influence. He therefore dismisses as insignificant the contact of the early English Baptists with the Dutch Anabaptists.⁴⁹ But Ernest Payne counter argues that:

By implication Dr. Hudson appears to be denying all similarity or connection between the Anabaptists and the English Baptists. This is, I am convinced, a misreading of history and would deprive the Baptists of one of the main clues to an understanding of their origin and development.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Manschreck, CL. 1974. *A History of Christianity in the World: from Persecution to Uncertainty*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall. P. 201.

⁴⁶ But some of them went wayward. Melchior Hofmann taught that Christ did not have a human nature and that the Parousia would occur in 1534.

⁴⁷ Estep, W.R. 1987. *The Anabaptist Story*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. P. 195.

⁴⁸ *Lion Handbook: History of Christianity*. 1980. Hert: Lion Publication. P. 401.

⁴⁹ Hudson, W. P. 1953. Who are the Baptists? *The Chronicle*. XV1.

⁵⁰ Estep, W.R 1975. *The Anabaptist Story*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. P. 207.

It is the opinion of Kenneth Scott Latourette that the Anabaptists contributed to the Separatist movement in England.⁵¹ At this juncture it is important to have a brief look at the life of the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century during the Reformation era in England and examine their influence on the Separatist⁵² movement from which the English Baptists emerged.

2.5 The Anabaptists in England and their influence on the Separatists

Apart from Holland and Moravia, England was another centre of Anabaptist activism such that as early as 1530, the Anabaptists were propagating their faith in London. Horst is of the opinion that by 1534 the Dutch Anabaptists had supplanted Lollardy in name as well as in doctrine and had become the left wing of the English Reformation. Fourteen of them were burnt at the stake in London in 1535.⁵³ Horst further argues that the number of Anabaptists burnt during the days of Henry VIII was larger than the number of the Lollards burnt in the previous century. In addition to this, the Church of England's "Forty-Two Articles" of 1553 included over seventeen articles directed against the Anabaptists. If Anabaptism was not a strong force to reckon with, the church would hardly have devoted much energy in attacking their teachings. John Knox also gave a stinging attack on the Anabaptists in a book published in 1560.⁵⁴

In 1551 sixty Separatists were arrested in Kent. Their soteriology was Anabaptist. One of their leaders, Humphrey Middleton, was burnt at the stake during the reign of Queen Mary.⁵⁵ Norwich was also the centre of Separatism. The area was under the influence of the Dutch Mennonites. A church was formed under the leadership of Robert Barrowe and separated from the Church of England in 1581. His followers, called the Barrowists, withheld their children from baptism and used lay ministry. They found a safe haven in Holland in 1593. The following year they became Anabaptists. This close similarity between the Anabaptists and the Separatist movement cannot be attributed to mere chance. The Anabaptists had a role to play. It is in this light that Horst observes that one may not claim that Anabaptism was the

⁵¹ Latourette, K.S. 1953. *A History of Christianity*. New York: Harper and Brothers. P. 779.

⁵² The Separatists considered the Church of England as fallen. Therefore, the only solution was to completely withdraw from it. The Puritans wanted to reform the Church of England from within in the direction of Calvinism. See Manschreck, C.L. 1974. *A History of Christianity in the World: from Persecution to Uncertainty*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall. Pp. 240-259.

⁵³ Horst, I.B. 1972. *The Radical Brethren*. Nieuwcoop: B. de Graaf. Pp. 184.

⁵⁴ Ibid. P. 62. The name of Knox's book was *An answer to a Great number of blasphemous Cavitations written by the Anabaptists and adversarie to God's eternal Predestination*.

⁵⁵ Estep, W.R. 1987. *The Anabaptist Story*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. P. 221.

exclusive cause of Separatism in England, but the evidence is overwhelming that it was a major influence.⁵⁶

2.6 The English Baptists

After examining the presence and influence of the Anabaptists in England, attention should be paid to the rise of the English Baptists.

To John Smyth is accorded the honour of the origin of the Baptist church in England. Smyth, a fellow at King's College, Cambridge, was ordained an Anglican priest in 1594, the year the English Separatists in Holland became Anabaptists. He became a lecturer at Lincoln in 1600 and refused to baptise children. In 1602 he was relieved of his duties after he had rebuked the sins of a prominent leader.⁵⁷ While living in Gainsborough in 1606, he could preach in the absence of the priest. When the authorities discovered this, they forbade him from preaching any more. This marked his separation from the Church of England.

He, together with his friend Thomas Helwys, formed a congregational church based on the Old Testament covenant. But due to the persecution of King James 1, they sought refuge in Holland in 1607. A year later, Smyth and his friends dissolved their church and reconstituted their new congregation based on believers' baptism after the profession of faith. Smyth baptised himself and then the rest of his members.⁵⁸ He did not seek baptism from the Mennonites, arguing that there was no church with good conscience like theirs who could baptise them. But this defence seems less convincing. The house they rented belonged to the Anabaptist Jan Munter. Scheffer has argued that Smyth and his congregation were surrounded by at least three Mennonite groups: the Flemish, the United High Germans and the Waterlanders. From the Waterlanders with whom he had direct contact, Scheffer contends that Smyth borrowed his views "on ministry, nay, even on baptism itself."⁵⁹

Scheffer's opinion seems to be more convincing in that in 1610 Smyth repudiated his self baptism and sought baptism from the Waterlander Mennonites. He further requested his church to do the same and join the Mennonites. The majority joined him. But a group of about ten members led by Helwys refused and returned to England. They established the first

⁵⁶ Ibid. P. 184

⁵⁷ Mcbeth, H.L. 1987. *The Baptist Heritage*. Nashville: Broadman. P. 33.

⁵⁸ Ibid. P. 34.

⁵⁹ Estep, W.R. 1975. *The Anabaptist Story*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. P. 221.

General Baptist Church on English soil in 1611.⁶⁰ Each church elected their leaders, both men and women.

From this available evidence it is clear that the Baptist ecclesiology did not develop independently from the Anabaptists. Nevertheless, the Baptist church should not be considered as a splinter group of the Anabaptists. The church developed from the Church of England as a separatist movement. But they were very much influenced by the Anabaptist ecclesiology.

The name Baptist, like the Anabaptist, Methodist, the Quakers and Christians, was coined by their opponents as a mockery. They called themselves “the Brethren”, or “the Baptised Churches”, or “the Baptised Way”. By the early 1640s some opponents were calling them the Baptists. It took a century before the name Baptist became accepted.⁶¹

2.7 Baptist Beliefs

2.7.1 The local church

Baptists believe that each local church is autonomous and congregational.⁶² The church is self-supporting and it makes its own decisions on matters pertaining to missions, employing a pastor, finances and many more. The congregation consists of baptised adult believers who have professed their faith in Christ. For this reason, Baptists do not baptise infants. The structure of the church is bottom up rather than top down. Deacons are elected by the congregation forming a church council. The council may authorise some important decisions after consulting members of the church. The congregation, not the deacons or the pastor, is the final authority. Though the local congregation is autonomous, Baptists meet regularly in local associations or at national convention. In this way Baptist churches are interdependent.

2.7.2 The priesthood of believers

Baptists believe that a believer has a direct link with Jesus and God without recognising intermediaries. In the Old Testament a priest used to pray as well as presenting sacrifices to God on behalf of the people. But in the understanding of the Baptists, the coming of Jesus Christ means that there is no mediator between God and humanity. Believers in Baptist

⁶⁰ Ibid. P. 222.

⁶¹ Mcbeth, H.L. 1987. *The Baptist Heritage*. Nashville: Broadman. P. 49.

⁶² Ibid. P. 79.

tradition are regarded as “holy saints”, or “the royal priesthood”. In this way everyone is regarded as a priest.⁶³ The pastor is regarded as an equal member in the church but he carries special responsibilities according to the needs of a particular local church. For this reason, ordination is not mandatory in the Baptist church. It is therefore not uncommon to find a Baptist church without a pastor or a church led by a pastor with very minimal theological or secular training. Most of the early Baptist pastors especially those who seceded from the Church of England, like Smyth and Roger Williams, were highly educated. But as time went by theological education did not play a prominent role among Baptist pastors. Their opponents could ridicule them as “base fellows”. Most of them were bi-vocational, earning their living as mechanics, tailors, soap boilers and cobblers.⁶⁴

2.7.3 The autonomy of the local church

According to the Baptist polity, each local church is autonomous. The autonomy of the local church is one of the most distinctive ecclesiological beliefs among the Baptists. They trace this to the New Testament churches which were self-governing and self-supporting. Each Baptist Church employs its pastor, runs all necessary programmes and is accountable only to God for its actions.⁶⁵ The system of hiring and supporting a pastor can be traced back to the days of the Anabaptists. According to the early Anabaptist teaching

The pastor of the flock should be someone who has good testimony from those who are outside the faith...But know that a support [sic], if he is in need of it, ought to be supplied by the church which elects him...But if a pastor be either expelled or led to the Lord through the cross another ought to succeed him...⁶⁶

The final authority of the church is not in the hands of deacons, elders or the pastors, but it is exercised by all members of the church. Thus the Baptists are congregational. In this way, the Baptist organisation is “bottom up” in structure rather than “top down.” Power as well as responsibility is in the hands of the members.⁶⁷ Resolutions are made through consensus. In the event that the church reaches a deadlock, voting takes place. In this way the Baptists claim to be democratic. However, autonomy does not entail being “independent”. Local

⁶³ Sullivan, J.L. 1983. *Baptist Polity as I See it*. Nashville: Broadman. P. 25.

⁶⁴ Mcbeth, H.L. 1987. *The Baptist Heritage*. Nashville: Broadman. P. 76. William Carey, the great missionary to India was a cobbler even though he became a professor of Oriental languages.

⁶⁵ Sullivan, J.L. 1983. *Baptist Polity as I See it*. Nashville: Broadman. P. 25.

⁶⁶ Estep, W.R. 1975. *The Anabaptist Story*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. P. 42.

⁶⁷ Sullivan, J.L. 1983. *Baptist Polity as I See it*. Nashville: Broadman. P. 79-80.

Baptist churches fellowship together at Convention or Association level. In Baptist tradition, churches do not live in isolation but are interdependent.

2.7.4 Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State

Baptists believe that individuals are at liberty to exercise their conscience. Therefore, they believe in religious liberty. During the Reformation era when religious persecution was common, Baptists advocated religious liberty for the Roman Catholics, Jews, Muslims and even the atheists.⁶⁸ John Smyth wrote:

...The magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion, or matters of conscience, to force or compel men to this or that form of religion, or doctrine; but leave Christian religion free to everyman's conscience, and handle only civil transgressions.⁶⁹

It is important to note that the intolerable conditions in which the Baptists lived necessitated them to strengthen the doctrine of separation of church and state. While recognising the existence of civil authority, Baptists do not recognise outside interference in matters of the church. This applies to any secular power such as the state. In this way, Baptists are against the concept of an established church or state church. Because of this strong belief in the separation of the church and the state, to a greater extent the Baptists do not take a critical engagement with the state. The church tends to be apolitical.

2.7.5 Supremacy of the Scripture

The Baptists consider the scripture as the final authority for religious belief and practice. The early English Baptists agreed that the "Holy Scripture is only sufficient, certain and infallible because it is the word of God."⁷⁰ For this reason Baptists do not recognise any human authority above the Bible. The popular question asked in Baptist assemblies is "what does the Bible say?" Some Baptists used confessions of faith as guidelines but did not elevate them to creedal authority. To the Baptists "the authority of the Bible comes from God who revealed himself completely in Christ Jesus, to whom the scripture bears witness."⁷¹

⁶⁸ Mcbeth, H.L. 1987. *The Baptist Heritage*. Nashville: Broadman. P. 85.

⁶⁹ Ibid. P. 85.

⁷⁰ Lumpkin, W. 1959. *Baptist Confession of Faith*. Valley Forge: Judson Press. P. 240.

⁷¹ Estep, W.R 1987. *The Baptist Witness: A Concise Baptist History*. Texas: Carib Baptist Publication. P. 599.

2.8 The Baptists in America

Having looked at the roots and beliefs of the Baptists, attention should be paid to the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. The first Baptists in America came from England. Among the first group were Roger Williams and Dr John Clarke.⁷² Williams was an ordained Church of England minister. Later he became a separatist. In late 1639 he became a Baptist. Though there is a consensus that both Roger Williams and Dr John Clarke organised Baptist churches in two separate areas within Rhode Island in 1639, it is not clear who was the first person. Williams is said to have started a Baptist Church in Providence, Rhode Island while John Clarke is said to have organised a Baptist Church in Newport, Rhode Island. Manschreck writes that “Williams’s withdrawal from the Massachusetts Puritan commonwealth and his settlement at Providence, Rhode Island in 1639 where a church was started on Baptist principles is regarded as the first Baptist Church in America.”⁷³ According to William H. Brackney, there “is much debate over the centuries as to whether the Providence or Newport deserved the place of ‘first’ Baptist congregation in America. Exact records for both congregations are lacking.”⁷⁴

Throughout the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries the Baptist church in America was one. There was no division between the north and the south. The church benefited from the Great Awakening in that many people joined the church. The Baptists were united working under different societies.⁷⁵ But in 1845 the unity was broken. The church was ill-equipped to handle the internal differences.

2.9 The origin of the Southern Baptist Convention

Three factors should be mentioned that precipitated the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention.

⁷² He was born in London in about 1603. Later he became a Separatist. He moved to Boston in 1631 and became a leader of a Separatist church. In 1639 he became a Baptist and organised the first Baptist church on the American soil. See McBeth, H.L. 1987. *The Baptist Heritage*. Nashville: Broadman Press. Pp 124-136.

⁷³ Manschreck, CL. 1974. *A History of Christianity in the World: from Persecution to Uncertainty*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall. P. 264.

⁷⁴ Brackney, William H. 2006. *Baptists in North America: an historical perspective*. Texas: Blackwell Publishing. P. 23.

⁷⁵ These were the American Baptist Missionary Union (1826) formerly called the Triennial Convention because it used to meet every three years; the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions (1814); the American Baptist Publication Society (1827) formerly the Baptist General Tract Society (1824) and the Baptist Home Missionary Society (HMS, 1832). McBeth, H.L. 1987. *The Baptist Heritage*. Nashville: Broadman Press. P. 343 ff.

2.9.1 The South's dissatisfaction with the operation of the Home Mission Society

The Home Mission Society (HMS) had achieved remarkable success in sending missionaries within a few years of its formation. By 1844 it had planted five hundred and fifty-one churches in the American mid-west. However, the churches in the south were less impressed. They lodged a complaint that they did not receive a fair share of home missionaries despite contributing to the missionary society.⁷⁶ They felt that the society, which had its central office in New York in the north, did not address the needs of the south. As early as 1835 there were calls for a separate mission body for the south. Missionaries from the north were reluctant to work in the south because of factors such as the question of Christians owning slaves, hot climate and the unwelcome spirit of the southerners. In this way the southerners felt neglected.

2.9.2 Differences in the preferred methods of organising the church

Another factor that contributed to the split was that Baptists in the north and south could not agree on one method of organising their churches. The north preferred the society system while the south preferred the convention system. Here is a summary of the two systems.⁷⁷

Under the convention system, churches send delegates and contributions to the central office to plan and carry out Christian ministries. One convention may have several boards such as the education, Sunday school, publications and many more. The convention system is church-based. Its work is the work of all churches. The representatives or delegates, sometimes called messengers, are sent by the church and are under the church.

But the society system is different. It is based on individual voluntary participation. Financial contribution is the determining factor. Interested individuals pay subscription fees and become members. While the convention has direct links to the churches, the society has no direct connection with the churches. Under the society system the boards have different members and may hold meetings at different times. Thus the convention system is more centralised than the society. In the society, individuals, not churches, work together.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Baker, A. 1972. *Southern Baptist and Its People*. Nashville: Broadman Press. P. 35.

⁷⁷ For details about the two systems see Baker, A. 1972. *Southern Baptist and Its People*. Nashville: Broadman Press. Pp. 97-101.

⁷⁸ The society system of organisation originates from the Baptist Missionary Society of England formed in 1792 which sent William Carey to India. The society system emulated some patterns of the English culture whose people tended to cluster into interest groups to push for certain economic and political interests. This English way of life was adopted into Baptist usage. The Massachusetts Missionary Society, formed in 1802, provides an

The south preferred the convention system for two reasons. In the south settlement was scattered. Travelling was expensive. In the New England area in the north, settlement was compact and travelling was much easier to attend different missionary societies. Again Baptists in the south had a strong church affiliation. They preferred an organisation based on denomination structure with one meeting where they could manage all their work. With these differences a split was fast approaching.

2.9.3 The question of slaves

The question of whether a Baptist Christian keeping slaves could be employed as a foreign missionary was the most contentious issue that hastened the Baptist split. The English colonial authority passed legislation in 1662 that a child born of a slave mother took the status of the mother. In 1667 an additional legislation was passed that “conferring baptism does not alter the condition of a person as to his bondage or freedom.”⁷⁹ The 1667 law was passed to address the fear of the southern farmers who were reluctant to allow their slaves to be Christianised lest they be set free.

In 1807 the importation of slaves into America was outlawed. However, with the invention of the cotton gin in 1792, slaves became more profitable in the south and less profitable in the north. The north became more industrialised. Many slaves were set free in the north but not in the south. Though slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1834, and though the importation of slaves into America was outlawed in 1807, some Baptist Christians were still keeping slaves in the south. Their argument was that slavery was justified in the Bible. The Emancipation Proclamation issued by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863 freed most slaves. However, it did not make slavery illegal. Slavery became illegal on 18 December 1865 when the Thirteenth Amendment to the USA Constitution was enacted.⁸⁰ In South Carolina, for example, Richard Furman, a famous Baptist preacher owned slaves and defended the system arguing that it was acceptable in the Bible.⁸¹

American example of the society method. For Carey and the Baptist Missionary Society see Neill, Stephen. 1986. *A History of Christian Missions*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

⁷⁹ Adler, M. J. ed. 1969. *The Negro in American History*. London: In Encyclopaedia Britannica Foundation. 3: 445.

⁸⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emancipation_Proclamation. Accessed on 26 November 2009.

⁸¹ Smith, H. S. S. et al. eds. 1972. *American Christianity* vol. II. X New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. P 184.

In 1841 both the HMS and the Triennial Convention resolved that the question of slavery fell outside their jurisdiction. They promised to remain neutral. The HMS employed slave owners like James E Reeves of Georgia.

But the Triennial Convention was put to a different test in 1844. The Baptist State Convention of Alabama in the south wanted to find out if a slave owner could be appointed as a foreign missionary. The board replied “one thing is certain; we can never be a party to any arrangement which would imply approbation to slavery.”⁸² This was interpreted as meaning that the board was no longer neutral. The board resolved to side with the north. The south felt that the north had violated the constitution and infringed their rights. Delegates from the south met in Augusta, Georgia on 8 May 1845. They adopted a new constitution and formed the Southern Baptist Convention with a strong denominational affiliation and kept slaves. They established mission boards. For the first time American Baptists were known as “south” and “north.”⁸³ The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was born.

⁸² McBeth, H.L. 1987. *The Baptist Heritage*. Nashville: Broadman Press. P. 387.

⁸³ Ibid. P. 391.

Chapter Three

The beginning of SBC mission work in Malawi and the establishment of BACOMA

3.1 Introduction

The SBC was not the first Baptist group to start missionary work in Malawi in 1959. The country had a significant Baptist presence prior to the arrival of the SBC. Baptist work in Malawi started some sixty-seven years earlier by Joseph Booth, a British Baptist in 1892. He established the Zambezi Industrial Mission (ZIM), an interdenominational faith mission at Mitsidi, in Blantyre.⁸⁴ In 1897 he took one of his converts, John Chilembwe, to the USA for theological training. After his studies, Chilembwe returned to Malawi and started the Providence Industrial Mission (PIM), at Mbombwe in Chiradzulu in 1900.⁸⁵ In 1938 another group seceded from the PIM under Peter Kalemba. This was the Achewa PIM (APIM). Booth was responsible for the introduction of several other Baptist and non-Baptist groups in Malawi.⁸⁶

However, the BMIM had a negative attitude towards Booth. Longwe has argued that the BMIM downplayed the contributions of Chilembwe and the PIM to the beginning of the Baptist Convention of Malawi. Because of this negative approach, very few members of BACOMA, like most people in Malawi, knew or know the PIM as Baptist, let alone the founder John Chilembwe. Longwe goes on to assert that some members especially in Lilongwe did not want to hear about Achewa PIM and their contribution to the beginning of BACOMA.

⁸⁴ For details about the life of Joseph Booth see Langworthy, H. 1996. *Africa for the African: Life of Joseph Booth*. Blantyre: CLAIM; Fiedler, K. 1996. Joseph Booth and the Writing of Malawian History. *Religion in Malawi* 1: 6. An Attempt at Interpretation. *Religion in Malawi* 1: 6. Pp. 30-38.

⁸⁵ For a detailed study on Chilembwe see Shepperson, T. and Price, G. 1987. *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the origins, setting and significance of the Nyasaland native rising of 1915*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Makondesa, P. 2007. *The Church History of Providence Industrial Mission*. Zomba. Kachere.

⁸⁶ Some of the Baptist churches that were introduced by Joseph Booth in Malawi include the Seventh Day Baptist, the Baptist Industrial Mission of Scotland and others. The Baptist Industrial Mission of Scotland in Gowa (in Ntcheu) was later handed over to the Churches of Christ in 1929. The non-Baptist churches are the Churches of Christ and the Seventh Day Adventist. For further reading see Langworthy, H. 1996. *Africa for the African: Life of Joseph Booth*. Blantyre: CLAIM.

3.2 The establishment of the BMIM

The BMIM came from Zimbabwe in 1959 under the Baptist Mission of Central Africa. SBC missionary work in Zimbabwe started in 1950.⁸⁷ After a successful reconnaissance survey that took the emissaries to Malawi and Zambia in 1954,⁸⁸ the SBC missionaries in Zimbabwe agreed in 1955 to set up a committee to go to Nyasaland (Malawi) and Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) to ask for permission from the two governments to start missionary work in these two countries, and that “we should go ahead and make application now for if this is to be a Federation, we should have work in all the areas.”⁸⁹

According to Day, the SBC work in Malawi was begun with the goal of not providing any subsidies to churches and to create as few institutions as possible.⁹⁰ This was a crucial factor in the BACOMA-BMIM relationship in the later years.⁹¹

3.3 The BMIM work in Blantyre and Zomba

The first two SBC missionary couples to come to Blantyre in 1959 were Leroy and Jean Albright and William (Bill) and Blanche Wester. They came from Zimbabwe. In 1960 the Albright family moved to Lilongwe. In the same year Gene and Beverley Kingsley came to Malawi straight from the USA and took residence in Blantyre.⁹² The Wester family later moved to Zomba, the former government seat of Malawi. Wester opened several Baptist churches in the rural areas of Zomba, but none in urban Zomba.

⁸⁷ On 14 September 1950, the Foreign Mission Board (called the International Mission Board since 1998) appointed Clyde T. Dotson and his wife Hattie, the first SBC missionaries in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Before their appointment, the Dotsons were independent missionaries. See Mwase, I. M.T. 2005. Shall they Till with Their Own hoes? Baptists in Zimbabwe and New patterns of Independence, 1950-2000. In Sanneh, Lamin and Carpenter, J.A. eds. *The Changing Face of Christianity Africa, the West and the World*. Oxford: OUP. Pp 63-79. See also Wester, B. May, 1960. *Area Report 1959-1960*. Limbe: BMCA.

⁸⁸ Saunders, D.L. 1973. A History of the Baptists in East and Central Africa. PhD. Thesis. Louisville: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. P. 119-122.

⁸⁹ <http://www.kabwatabaptistchurch.org/> accessed on 4th April, 2008. The “Federation” referred to in the quotation was the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland which came into existence in 1953 and was dissolved in 1963.

⁹⁰ Cauthen, B.J. and Means, F.K. 1981. *Advance to Bold Mission Thrust: A History of Southern Baptist Missions*. Richmond: Foreign Mission Board. P. 163-165.

⁹¹ But in Zimbabwe the SBC established several vibrant institutions like the Publishing House, the Baptist Theological Seminary of Zimbabwe, the Baptist Camp, the magnificent Sanyati Baptist Hospital, Sanyati Baptist Primary and Secondary Schools. See Mwase, Isaac, M.T. 2005. Shall they Till with Their Own hoes? Baptists in Zimbabwe and New patterns of Independence, 1950-2000. In Sanneh, Lamin and Carpenter, J.A. eds. *The Changing Face of Christianity Africa, the West and the World*. Oxford: OUP. Pp 63-79.

⁹² Cauthen, B.J. and Means, F.K. 1981. *Advance to Bold Mission Thrust: A History of Southern Baptist Missions*. Richmond: Foreign Mission Board. P. 163-164.

The BMIM found one Malawian Baptist in Blantyre. He was Steven Galatiya. He had become a Baptist in the 1950s while he was working in South Africa. He met Gene Kingsley in Blantyre by mere chance. He proved valuable to the missionaries. He assisted them in interpreting the gospel and witnessing.⁹³

At first the missionaries used to fellowship in what is today the Malawi Congress Party sub-national headquarters building at Chichiri. In 1961 the missionaries organised a Baptist Church in Clliccord House in Limbe. Later they moved to Chichiri Secondary School. This marked the beginning of Blantyre Baptist Church.

In the Zomba area, Thomas Kachasu Gama was a member of a Zionist Church. He was not satisfied with the teachings of this church. He therefore approached the SBC missionaries Bill Wester and Gene Kingsley. In September 1962 this Zionist Church became the first Baptist church led by a Malawian to be affiliated to the BMIM. Its name is Ndalama Baptist Church. Thomas Kachasu Gama,⁹⁴ the father of Medson Kachasu Gama who was to found Zomba Baptist Church in 1979, was appointed as its pastor.

3.4 BMIM work in Lilongwe

The growth of the BMIM in Lilongwe was largely due to the contribution of the APIM. When the Albrights moved to Lilongwe, they worked with the APIM as a launch pad for evangelism. Since both were Baptist, the APIM did not object to working with him though they belonged to different Baptist families. Some of the leaders in the APIM who later played a decisive role in the formation of BACOMA were Yosafati Ndege, Matthew Ndalama, Kamkalamba and Peter Kalonga.⁹⁵

In 1962 the BMIM organised a lay pastors' training institute in Lilongwe. Those who attended the training apart from members of the APIM were Steven Galatiya, Dafren Makhaya who had become a Baptist while he was working in Zimbabwe and Thomas Kachasu Gama of Zomba.

⁹³ Longwe, H.H. 2007. Democratisation of the Christian Faith: The Influence of the Baptist Doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers on the History of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA). PhD. thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi. Pp. 52-54.

⁹⁴ Ibid. P 52.

⁹⁵ Longwe, H.H. 2000 Identity by Dissociation: The first Group to Secede from Chilembwe's Church: A History of Peter Kalemba and the Achewa Providence Industrial Mission. MTh. thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi. P. 66.

Members of the APIM continued meeting with Albright to study the Bible at the Lilongwe community hall. Later they moved into a building belonging to Mr Kadango at Falls Estate. As the number grew big, the BMIM bought land opposite the Kadango building. In 1965 a Bible School was constructed.⁹⁶ Through the joint missionary work of the BMIM and the APIM, many people joined the Baptist church. They began assembling in one of the rooms at the Bible School. A plot was bought at Kawale 2 within the city of Lilongwe where a church was constructed. This was the first Baptist church to be affiliated to the BMIM in Lilongwe and central Malawi in 1966.⁹⁷

Members of APIM also played a leading role in the establishment of the Baptist work in Nkhosakota in 1968 and during the 1970 National Crusade that was organised by the BMIM. For this reason, Leroy Albright printed a hymn book with the face of bishop Kamkalamba of APIM on its front cover. It was popularly known as the “Kamkalamba hymn book.”⁹⁸

3.5 Establishment BACOMA

The SBC came to Malawi with the aim of establishing an indigenous church that was self-supporting and self-propagating.⁹⁹ The implication was that the missionaries would run the BMIM while the Malawians should run their local church. Resources from America were meant for the American missionaries in Malawi. While the missionaries knew all this, their co-workers, the Malawians were left in the dark. Thus the BMIM and Malawian Baptists were two different groups.¹⁰⁰

Steven Galatiya was the first Malawian to go for theological training at Gweru in 1963. Towards the end of his studies he wanted to know his conditions of employment. The BMIM

⁹⁶ Since 1994 the Bible School was upgraded to the Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi. It is accredited to the University of Malawi. It started offering degrees in 2009.

⁹⁷ Longwe, H.H. 2000 Identity by Dissociation: The first Group to Secede from Chilembwe’s Church: A History of Peter Kalembe and the Achewa Providence Industrial Mission. MTh. thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi. P. 80.

⁹⁸ Ibid. See Plate 20 (A).

⁹⁹ See Day, R. Southern Baptist Missionaries in Malawi: Who are they? *Religion in Malawi* 11, November 2004. Pp 29-37.

¹⁰⁰ According to Pastor Rueben Nkhata, Malawians thought that they would work together with the missionaries as one Baptist family just like the Presbyterian and Roman Catholic missionaries who did not set up a special “church” or organisation for the nationals and another one for the missionaries. Pastor Rueben Nkhata. Former president of BACOMA. 2008. Interviewed by the author, Lilongwe, 16 January.

responded that “they did not feel they had a place they could use him and for sure they did not pay pastors.”¹⁰¹

After his theological studies in 1965, Galatiya was an associate pastor to the multi-racial church that congregated at Clliccord House in Limbe. Roy Davidson, who was the chairperson of the BMIM at that time, took a unilateral decision in 1966 that Malawians should support Steven Galatiya, their “indigenous” pastor. This alarmed Malawians. Davidson went further by making two suggestions: that Galatiya should open a bookstall in Mwanza, his home town, some one hundred kilometers west of Blantyre near the Malawi-Mozambique border, as a means of self-support. The second suggestion was that he should go to South Africa, his wife’s home country, as a missionary. In South Africa racial tension was high in 1966. This meant that Galatiya would serve in the “Black only” areas. To the Malawians the decision was “racist.”¹⁰² Galatiya had no choice but to leave the multi-racial church in Limbe. He started a new church in his house in Newlands. The new church was named the New Jerusalem Baptist. The next Sunday Clliccord House was without the Chichewa service.¹⁰³

Leroy Albright took a different approach. He used to support Galatiya secretly without the knowledge of other missionaries. At that time Albright was the chairperson of the Literature and Music Committee of the BMIM. He resigned his post hoping that pastor Dafren Makhaya would take over. He wanted a quick transfer of responsibilities to Malawians.¹⁰⁴ But the BMIM never let Makhaya be the chair. He was made the deputy. According to Longwe, if Makhaya was made chair, he would have access to American money, something that most Baptist missionaries were not prepared to accept. Unlike the Baptist Missionary Society working among the Bakongo,¹⁰⁵ the Southern Baptist missionaries in Malawi did not put in place proper mechanisms to devolve authority to Malawians. Malawians were not trained to

¹⁰¹ Longwe, H.H. 2007. *Democratisation of the Christian Faith: The Influence of the Baptist Doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers on the History of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA)*. PhD. thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi. P.73.

¹⁰² Rachel NyaGondwe-Banda. 2005. *Women of Bible and Culture: Baptist Convention Women in Southern Malawi*. Zomba: Kachere. P. 28.

¹⁰³ Ibid. P. 28.

¹⁰⁴ Longwe, H.H. 2000 *Identity by Dissociation: The first Group to Secede from Chilembwe’s Church: A History of Peter Kalembe and the Achewa Providence Industrial Mission*. MTh. thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi. P. 85.

¹⁰⁵ The Baptist Missionary Society began missionary work among the Bakongo at Ngombe Lutete in what is today the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1884. Their missionary field covered also some parts of the present day Angola. In 1914, the missionaries devolved a considerable amount of authority to Africans. See Mackay, D.J. Simon Kimbangu and the BMS tradition. *Journal of Religion in Africa*. XVII, 2, 1987. P. 113.

run key institutions such as the Baptist Media Centre, the Baptist Farm and the Baptist Publications. Today these institutions are in their doldrums.

In 1969 Davidson discovered that Albright was supporting Galatiya. The BMIM did not like this. Albright secretly invited Galatiya, Makhaya and McFarlane Njolomole Phiri to a meeting for one week at Chowe in Ntcheu, over two hundred kilometers north of Blantyre. He encouraged them to form their own Convention and write the constitution.¹⁰⁶ In June 1969 Albright resigned both as the secretary of the BMIM and from the Foreign Mission Board of the SBC.¹⁰⁷ He was also against attending mission meetings of “Whites only.”¹⁰⁸

The situation became tense. Dr Cornell Goerner, the SBC International Mission Board secretary for Africa, was invited from Richmond, Virginia. On Goerner’s advice, Albright rescinded his resignation from the SBC. But Goerner had to transfer him to Zambia so that he was no longer in contact with Malawians.¹⁰⁹

But this did not go well with three Malawian leaders namely McFarlane Njolomole Phiri, Steven Galatiya and Dafren Makhaya. They insisted that Albright should not go to Zambia. According to Longwe, in order to silence them the BMIM bought them off.¹¹⁰ The missionaries managed to convince the three leaders to support the idea that Albright should leave Malawi. Once they did that the missionaries would buy them a motorbike each. Upon hearing about driving a motorbike, the three Malawians rescinded their decision. But once Albright left, the BMIM never honoured their promise. Galatiya called this episode “politics of poverty.”¹¹¹

After the departure of Albright the relationship between the BMIM and Malawians remained strained. Malawians went ahead to form their organization. Charles Middleton assisted Njolomole to draft a constitution. On 26 May 1972,¹¹² the Baptist Convention of Malawi was

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. P. 86.

¹⁰⁷ Mission Minutes of BMCA. Blantyre. 29 June-3 July 1969. P. 3. BTSM archives.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. P. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Minutes of BMCA-Malawi, Second session, 5-7 August 1969. P. 4. BTSM archives.

¹¹⁰ Longwe, H.H. 2007. Democratisation of the Christian Faith: The Influence of the Baptist Doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers on the History of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA). PhD. thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi. P.78.

¹¹¹ Ibid. P.78.

¹¹² BACOMA Minute, 26 May 1972. BTSM archives.

born. It was registered under the Trustees Act of the Laws of Malawi on 25 January 1973.¹¹³ The trustees were Njolomole, Galatiya, Makhaya, Christwick Gazamiyala and Yosafati Ndege, a member of the APIM. Njolomole was its first president. Makhaya was the secretary while Galatiya was the treasurer.

When BACOMA was formed, the organization used to receive limited support from the missionaries such as the construction of the church buildings. But pastors neither received any salary from the missionaries nor from BACOMA. Again from its inception, BACOMA guaranteed the autonomy and freedom of the local churches. The constitution clearly stated that

- B. Participation by the churches is completely voluntary.
- C. Neither the Convention nor any of its officers have the authority to interfere with the rights of the participating churches or to exercise control over those churches to legislate their local affairs.
- D. None of the decisions of the Convention automatically becomes binding on any of the participating churches without their consent.¹¹⁴

¹¹³Copy of Trustees Act Ch. 5:03. BTSM archives.

¹¹⁴BACOMA Constitution, 1973, Article 4, Sections B, C and D. But the clauses quoted above were repealed in 1992 when the BACOMA constitution was amended. However, the spirit of autonomy is strongly entrenched in BACOMA.

Chapter Four

Schisms in South Africa and Zambia

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores a few examples of Baptist schisms in the neighbouring countries of South Africa and Zambia. In subsequent chapters, comparisons will be made between ecclesiastical schisms in Malawi, South Africa and Zambia.

4.2 The beginning of Baptist work in South Africa

Baptists in South Africa have two roots. Most Baptists came from England while the remaining group came from Germany.

The English Baptists came to South Africa in 1820. They were part of a settler party that was led by a Methodist minister, Rev W. Shaw.¹¹⁵ The Baptists established their first church at Assegai River (Salem) under the leadership of W. Shepherd. Another church was established at Grahamstown in 1823. Rev W Miller was its first minister.¹¹⁶

According to Kretzschmar, the Baptist Church in Germany was started by Johann Gerhard Oncken in 1834 following the Great Awakening Revival.¹¹⁷ The first influx of the German Baptists arrived at the Cape in 1857.¹¹⁸

After some years of ministry, the Baptist churches formed the Baptist Union of South Africa (BUSA) in 1877. It was a Union of mainly white South Africans. Membership to the Union was based on two conditions. In the first place, only autonomous churches with their own constitutions could be members. This was made necessary so that the Union did not control the affairs of the local churches. Secondly, only financially “viable” churches could become

¹¹⁵ Hudson-Reed, S. 1978. *History of the Baptist Union of South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: Pietermaritzburg Historical Society. P. 11.

¹¹⁶ Kretzschmar, L. The Privatisation of the Christian Faith among South African Baptists with particular reference to its nature, extent, causes and consequences. PhD. thesis. Cape Town: University of Cape Town. P. 27.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. P. 23. See also Mogashoa, M.H. 1995. Correcting Baptist History on William Duma 1907-1977. An Oral History Contribution. In Denis, P. ed. 2000. *Orality, Memory & the Past. Listening to the Voices of Black Clergy under Colonialism and Apartheid*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications. Pp 194-210.

¹¹⁸ Mogashoa, M.H. 1995. A Critical Study of the Life and Work of Rev. W. Duma 1907-1977 as a contribution to the history of the Baptist Church in Southern Africa. MTh. thesis. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal. P. 58.

members. All churches that were unable to pay their financial subscriptions for membership were not considered. Thus from the beginning the Union was largely “White” except for two “Black” churches; Klerksdorp Baptist and Umgeni Road Baptist which was led by Rev William Duma in Durban.¹¹⁹

4.3 Schisms in South Africa

Among the South African Baptists, the major causes of conflicts and separation were finances and differences in racial-political opinions. Moroka Humphrey Mogashoa has put it straight that from the beginning, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa safeguarded its financial interests. It was not easy for a black church to join the Union because they were categorised as not financially “viable.”¹²⁰

The contentious issue of race contributed to the strained relationship between the BUSA and the black Transkei Baptist Union (TBU). Kretzschmar writes that the BUSA imbibed the ideology of white supremacy. After 1948, though the BUSA often addressed critical resolutions to the government, they both preached and practiced segregation of the black and the white within their local congregations as well as in national structures.¹²¹ In 1976 the churches in Transkei and Phondoland were not happy with the way in which the officials in the BUSA ran the affairs of the church. In the end the TBU seceded from the Union.

The BUSA had demarcated churches and associations according to language boundaries. Many people felt that this duplicated the South African government’s geo-racial divisions. According to Kretzschmar, when Transkei was declared “independent” in 1976, the BUSA suggested that the churches that were Xhosa speaking should become part of Transkei Association and those on the Natal Coast which were Zulu speaking should become part of the Natal Association.¹²² Thus the Phondo people who were Xhosa speaking were incorporated into the Transkei Association. To many blacks this was nothing but affirming

¹¹⁹ Ibid. P. 66.

¹²⁰ Mogashoa, H. M. 1995. A Critical Study of the Life and Work of Rev. W. Duma 1907-1977 as a contribution to the History of the Baptist Church in Southern Africa. MTh. thesis. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal. P.77 and P. 91. For a detailed study about the BUSA-BCSA relation see also Kretzschmar, L. 1992. The Privatisation of the Christian faith among South African Baptists: with particular reference to its nature, extent, causes and consequences. PhD. thesis. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.

¹²¹ Kretzschmar, L. 1992. The Privatisation of the Christian faith Among South African Baptists: With particular Reference to its nature, Extent, Causes and Consequences. PhD. thesis. Cape Town: University of Cape Town. P.210.

¹²² Ibid. P. 252.

apartheid. Kretzschmar goes on to write that another reason for the secession was that the BUSA declined the TBU's request to merge. Rev. Nkuhlu of Transkei states that:

In 1980-81 we asked whether we could be linked with them, they said 'no', it was not permitted by their constitution. This constitution of theirs had become an idol. It has since also caused problems between the Union and the Convention...The Union wanted Transkei to become an association of the Union. But we knew that this was a meaningless thing. We wanted to have an identity to be equal to others within the Union. Instead we were treated like children. Our complaints and views were not heard. For this reason we withdrew and became an autonomous group.¹²³

In terms of political differences, Mogashoa states that whites accused the Baptist Convention which was predominately black, of having radical views, politically motivated and inclined.¹²⁴ But even the BUSA members had different political views. Fredrick Hale states that some members of the BUSA supported¹²⁵ the *Kairos Document* while others were against it. Most whites condemned it. For instance, Edward Cain regarded the document as based solidly on Marxist-Leninist ideological concepts with "the sprinkling of biblical quotations to give it a religious flavour."¹²⁶ Cain's magazine, the *Signposts*, was sent to many Baptist ministers and members. After the 1985 annual assembly, BUSA issued a critical statement to the State President. Some members of the right wing within the church rejected the statement and distanced themselves from the criticism:

It was clear from the action of the last Assembly that our decision to embroil our denomination in politics was taken without the priority of all our churches. Delegates voted as they saw it...and they were probably swayed by the charisma of the political activists who had attended the Assembly with the clear intention of dragging our denomination into politics...¹²⁷

Furthermore, Hale states that some members of the BUSA were in favour of the Rustenburg Conference¹²⁸ while others were not. One of them who supported it was the former BUSA

¹²³ Makhanya, G. 1990. A History of the Baptist Convention of Southern Africa. In: Hoffmeister, Des and Gurney, B.J. eds. *The Barkly West National Awareness Workshop*. P.36.

¹²⁴ Mogashoa, H.M. 1998. Institutionalised segregation: an overview of the Black Baptist Clergy's seclusion from Mainstream Power Structures 1859-1988. *Studia Historicae Ecclesiasticae* XXIV. P.55.

¹²⁵ I do not know if any members of the BUSA signed the document.

¹²⁶ Hale, F. 1992. The Social Ethics of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. PhD. thesis. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal. P. 324.

¹²⁷ Gorven, R.A 28 May, 1986. A letter entitled "Baptists and Politics." Quoted in Kretzschmar, L. 1992. The Privatisation of the Christian faith among South African Baptists: with particular reference to its nature, extent, causes and consequences. PhD. thesis. Cape Town: University of Cape Town. P. 259.

¹²⁸ The Rustenburg Conference was an inter-racial national conference of churches of South Africa which took place in Rustenburg in November 1990. It represented a broad spectrum of denominations and ecclesiastical

president Ellis André. For André, the BUSA in the past took many resolutions but its witness was defective. The BUSA was “pietistic but less faithful to the gospel.”¹²⁹ But as for another member of BUSA, Peter Hammond, the Conference was “rubber stamped by the ANC and monopolised by the SACC to promote a political programme similar to that of the ANC.”¹³⁰

Mogashoa argues that the BUSA dominated the affairs of the Baptist church. In 1980 the BUSA gave the Special Baptist Associations six years to dissolve and join the Union. These associations included the Baptist Convention of South Africa (BCSA), the Afrikaanse Baptiste Kerk (ABK), the National Indian Baptist Association (NIBA) and the Baptist Association of South Africa (BASA). This did not go well with the BCSA. They were not prepared to be assimilated into the Union. Rather, the BCSA opted for a merger. The negotiations for the merger began in 1982, when the BCSA, during its annual general assembly, appointed a subcommittee to make “concrete proposals to unify the Baptists in South Africa.”¹³¹ This resolution was also affirmed during the BCSA’s annual assembly of that took place at the Bochemelo in 1985. However, as for the Afrikaans-speaking ABK, it opposed any move to eradicate apartheid in the BUSA and stopped attending the merger meetings. During its annual general meeting at Ethembeni in the Orange Free State, the BCSA insisted that there should be one theological college, that finances and properties should equally belong to all, and that there should be no merger without equality.¹³² But the BUSA could not yield to these demands. The president and the general secretary of the BCSA were invited to the BUSA’s annual assembly which took place in Cape Town in October 1987. They were quizzed about the merger. During this assembly, the BUSA proposed that four representatives from each side should reconvene the talks about the merger. While these representatives were on the way to Cape Town to attend the BCSA’s annual general meeting which began on 28 December 1987 to 1 January 1988,¹³³ and before the president and the general secretary of the BCSA could table the BUSA’s proposal, the

agencies. Most of them were members of the SACC. They discussed the implications of the Christian social ethics for the rapidly changing national situation.

¹²⁹ Hale, F. 1992. *The Social Ethics of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa*. PhD. thesis. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal. P.330.

¹³⁰ Moderate Churchmen Slum the Conference. 1991. *The Citizen* 13th November, P.11.

¹³¹ Mogashoa, H. M. 1998. Institutionalised segregation: an overview of the Black Baptist Clergy’s seclusion from mainstream power structures 1859-1988. *Studia Historicae Ecclesiasticae* XXIV. P. 54.

¹³² Hoffmeister, D. and Gurney, B.J. 1990. *The Barkely west national Awareness Workshop*. Johannesburg: BCSA. P. 33.

¹³³ According to Mogashoa, these representatives came to the assembly late. Mogashoa, H. M. 1998. Institutionalised segregation: an overview of the Black Baptist Clergy’s seclusion from Mainstream Power Structures 1859-1988. *Studia Historicae Ecclesiasticae* XXIV. P.57.

BCSA had resolved to stand as an independent body and withdrew its association status from the BUSA.¹³⁴ The BCSA emphasised that it would later consult with the BUSA regarding the implementation of the merger.¹³⁵ In 1988, the BCSA became a member of the All African Baptist Fellowship (AABF) and joined the South African Council of Churches (SACC).¹³⁶ Mogashoa writes that the constitution of the BCSA was amended in 1988 to accommodate the new structure. The BCSA was also registered with the South African government as an independent body.¹³⁷

4.4 Baptist work in Zambia

Baptist work in Zambia started in 1905 as an interdenominational mission work when two British missionaries, William Arthur Phillips and Henry Masters, moved from Malawi (then Nyasaland) into what is now the Copperbelt Province of Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia), in order to establish a mission station. Phillips had been a member of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in the days of Charles Huddon Spurgeon in England. He went to Nyasaland as a missionary in 1901. Phillips and Masters were missionaries working under the Nyasa Industrial Mission (NIM), an interdenominational faith mission founded by Joseph Booth.¹³⁸ In Zambia they settled in the Lambaland, Kapopo district in Ndola. They established the Kafulafuta mission. The major activities were evangelisation, education and translation of the Bible into Lamba. By 1912 a boarding school had been set up.¹³⁹ Due to financial problems, the mission was adopted by the South African Baptist Mission Society in 1914. Clement Doke and Mr and Mrs German were its first missionaries to serve at Kafulafuta mission.¹⁴⁰

In 1955 the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) missionaries in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) agreed to set up a committee to go to Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia to study the possibilities of extending their mission field there. In May 1956, three missionaries, Clyde Dotson, Gerald Harvey and Bill Wester, were sent to Northern Rhodesia on a fact-finding

¹³⁴ Ibid. P.57.

¹³⁵ Kretzschmar, L. 1992. The privatisation of the Christian faith among South African Baptists: with particular reference to its nature, extent, causes and consequences. PhD. thesis. Cape Town: University of Cape Town. P. 271.

¹³⁶ Mogashoa, H. M. 1998. Institutionalised segregation: an overview of the Black Baptist Clergy's seclusion from mainstream power structures 1859-1988. *Studia Historicae Ecclesisticae* XXIV. P. 57.

¹³⁷ Email H. Mogashoa to the author, 14 April 2009.

¹³⁸ Shepperson, P. and Price, T. 1958. *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the origins, setting and significance of the Nyasaland native rising of 1915*. Edinburgh: EUP. Pp. 323-326. See also Mwase, G. S. 1975. *Strike a blow and die: the classic story of the Chilembwe rising*. London: Heinemann.

¹³⁹ <http://www.kabwatabaptistchurch.org/> accessed on 4th April, 2008.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

mission. Finally, Tom and Mary Small and Zebedee and Evelyn Moss were sent to Zambia as the first SBC missionaries in November 1959 and settled in Kitwe working under the Baptist Mission of Central Africa (BMCA).¹⁴¹ The Baptist Mission in Central Africa later changed its name to Baptist Mission in Zambia (BMZ) in 1964 after Zambia became independent. The Baptist Convention of Zambia (BCZ) was formed through the missionary work of the BMZ missionaries in 1974.

4.5 Schisms in Zambia

In Zambia, Reinhard Ludwig Frey writes that the administration of Rev Peter Chintala, who was the general secretary of the Zambian Baptist Association, contributed to the split between the church and its local partners because of the way he ran the affairs of the church.¹⁴² According to Pastor Victor Kanyense of Kabwata Reformed Baptist Church, Chintala misappropriated church funds.

If he took his car to the garage, for instance, and he was charged R50.00, he would write R500.00. The church used to pay these expenses. But a certain member of the church discovered his tricks.¹⁴³

The tension between Chintala and the church was very high as he left for further studies in the USA in 1990. Frey further writes that in May 1991 Chintala was disciplined and dropped as the general secretary. But he did not accept the discipline. When he returned from the USA, he gathered a good number of pastors who were loyal to him. He told them that he was going to start a new ministry and therefore they should rally behind him. About 90% of Kwacha Union Baptist Church and the whole of Twatasha Baptist church followed him. They formed a new church. It was registered with the registrar of societies on 10 March 1991 as the Free Baptist Church of Zambia.¹⁴⁴

Another conflict which subsequently led to the formation of the Baptist Fellowship of Zambian (BFZ) was between the Baptist Mission in Zambia of the SBC and the Baptist

¹⁴¹ Saunders, D.L. 1973. A History of the Baptists in East and Central Africa. PhD. Thesis. Louisville: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Pp. 122 ff.

¹⁴² Frey, R.L. 2005. The History of the Zambian Baptist Association 1905-2005. PhD dissertation. Zomba: University of Malawi. P. 274.

¹⁴³ Pastor Victor Kanyense. 2008. Interviewed by the author at Scottsville Baptist Church, Pietermaritzburg, Sunday, 23 March. Pastor Kanyense is Zambian. He belongs to the Zambia Baptist Association. He is currently pursuing MTh in Theology and Development, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

¹⁴⁴ Frey, R. L. 2005. The History of the Zambian Baptist Association 1905-2005. PhD. dissertation. Zomba: University of Malawi. P. 275.

Convention of Zambia in 1995 based on Southern Baptist missionary work. Though there were some elements of racial tension, the major cause of the split was church polity. A month after its formation, the BCZ requested the Baptist Mission in Zambia to remove a certain missionary from the seminary due to his alleged racial bias. But the missionaries refused to do so. This caused some tension. According to Pastor Conrad Mbewe of Kabwata Reformed Baptist church, during the 10th anniversary in 1984, the BCZ national executive proposed changes to the constitution that would give it more administrative powers over member churches. This was strongly opposed by the BMZ. The BMZ regarded this as an infringement on the autonomy of the churches, a treasured aspect of Baptist polity.¹⁴⁵

Secondly, Pastor Victor Kanyense narrated that, in 1992, the BCZ proposed that any missionary coming to work in Zambia under the BMZ should get an endorsement from the BCZ. The BCZ informed the government about this new development. Thus some missionaries whose work permits had expired failed to get them renewed. The BCZ insisted that if the BMZ did not agree they should leave Zambia. The BMZ appealed to the Zambian government on this issue, but the government sided with the BCZ. Hence, the BMZ sued the Zambian government. The BCZ was assisted by the Dean of Law at the University of Zambia who was also a Baptist. But the High Court dismissed the case saying it was a family affair between the BCZ and the BMZ. However, some Zambian pastors protested against the BCZ. They sided with the American missionaries. But the BCZ maintained its position. In the end the “protesters” registered another convention called the Baptist Fellowship of Zambia (BFZ) in 1995. The missionaries realised that in order to have a good working relationship with the nationals, they had to soften some of their policies.¹⁴⁶ At present the ZBF works with the American missionaries (the SBC) while the BCZ does not. Since I did not go to Zambia to carry out further research, my knowledge about the two Conventions is limited.

4.6 Conclusion

From this account, it is clear that Baptists in different parts of the world face various challenges. These include racial tensions, financial mismanagement and challenges related to the structure of the Baptist church. Later in the thesis, comparisons will be made between these schisms and those that occurred in Malawi. The focus will be to find similarities and

¹⁴⁵ <http://www.kabwatabaptistchurch.org/> accessed on 4th April, 2008.

¹⁴⁶ Pastor Victor Kanyense. 2008. Interviewed by the author at Scottsville Baptist Church, Pietermaritzburg, 23 March. But I do not have more details about these two Conventions in Zambia since I interviewed only one person.

differences between these countries, while paying particular attention to the organisational structure of the Baptist church. Is the problem of church government in the Baptist Church a major cause of schism or are there other factors worth considering?

Chapter Five

Pastor Samuel Malabwanya's leadership in BACOMA and the formation of the Indigenous Baptist Convention of Malawi (IBCM)

5.1 Introduction

While chapter three surveyed the establishment of the Baptist Mission in Malawi and the subsequent formation of BACOMA and chapter four explored some Baptist schisms in South Africa and Zambia, this chapter critically examines the life and vocation of Pastor Samuel Lazarus Malabwanya. He was a member of the BACOMA executive committee for twelve years and served as its secretary for eight years. In 1992 he seceded from BACOMA and formed the Indigenous Baptist Convention of Malawi (IBCM). Having been in BACOMA for a long period, he was singled out as a case study in order to understand causes for schisms and how they relate to Baptist ecclesiology, particularly church government.

5.2 Malabwanya's early life

Pastor Samuel Lazarus Malabwanya was born in Msiyankhuni village, Nsanje district, the most southern district of Malawi bordering Mozambique, on 4 July 1948. Both parents were blind. In the second half of the 1950s they moved to Blantyre, some one hundred and twenty-five kilometres north of Nsanje.¹⁴⁷ As they were roaming about in the streets, they were spotted by Effie Cameron. Effie Cameron was an expatriate American member of the Baptist Church. She took them into her home and provided the Malabwanya family with the basic necessities. She attended the Baptist church which was fellowshiping at Cliccord House in Limbe within Blantyre. Since she did not have a car, a Baptist couple, Beverly and Gene Kingsley, Southern Baptist Convention missionaries living in Blantyre, used to transport her to and from the church. The young Samuel, his sister Fanny and the parents joined them.¹⁴⁸ In this way the whole family became Baptist. This was in 1961.

¹⁴⁷ Pastor S. Malabwanya. Founder of IBCM, and his wife Chrissie. 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 5 July.

¹⁴⁸ NyaGondwe-Banda, R. 2005. *Women of Bible and Culture: Baptist Convention Women in Southern Malawi*. Zomba: Kachere. Pp 10-21.

At first Malabwanya was a member of the African General Mission¹⁴⁹ church, today called the Africa Evangelical Church of Malawi. He was baptised in 1964 by a missionary called Thomas.¹⁵⁰ Later on Gene Kingsley took the young Malabwanya into his home and sent him to school up to standard 8. Apart from assisting in the domestic chores, Malabwanya proved to be a good interpreter to the Kingsley family. Through his association with the missionaries, he became fluent in English.

5.3 Malabwanya as a pastor

Malabwanya attended the Bible school in Lilongwe from 1968 to 1970. In 1971 he went to Gweru Baptist Theological Seminary in Zimbabwe. He married Chrissie Galatiya in 1972.¹⁵¹ They graduated on 23 December 1973, not in 1975 as indicated by NyaGondwe.¹⁵²

After graduating he became the pastor of the New Jerusalem Baptist church which had been founded by his father-in-law seven years earlier. At the same time he was employed by the BMIM at the Baptist Media Centre as the producer and teacher of religious programmes. The BMIM used to produce recorded gospel messages on audio tapes which were then distributed to the Baptist members for listening.¹⁵³ The messages were also aired on the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), the only radio station at that time.

While serving the church in Blantyre, he was elected vice-secretary, the secretary and later the chairperson of the Blantyre Association. At Convention level, he served as the deputy general secretary in 1979. He was the general secretary of BACOMA from 1980 to 1986. In 1987 he was elected the vice-president and in 1988 he was elected the president, a position that he held up to 1989 when he was removed from office. He was in BACOMA executive committee for twelve years. Finally, on 13 September 1992, he seceded from BACOMA and not in 1993 as noted by Longwe.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ The church was founded by the South African General Mission in the 1920s.

¹⁵⁰ Pastor S. Malabwanya. Founder of IBCM, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 5 July. According to Malabwanya, this missionary did not stay for a long time.

¹⁵¹ She is the daughter of Pastor Stephen Galatiya, one of the first Baptist pastors.

¹⁵² Pastor S. Malabwanya. Founder of IBCM, and his wife Chrissie. 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 5 July. But according to NyaGondwe Malabwanya went to the seminary in 1973 and graduated in 1975. However, Malabwanya's certificate indicates that he graduated in 1973 not 1975 as written by NyaGondwe-Banda. See Rachael NyaGondwe-Banda. 2005. *Women of Bible and Culture: Baptist Convention Women in Southern Malawi*. Zomba: Kachere. P. 73.

¹⁵³ Pastor S. Malabwanya. Founder of IBCM, Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 5 July.

¹⁵⁴ Longwe, H.H. 2007. *Democratisation of the Christian Faith: The Influence of the Baptist Doctrine of the "Priesthood of all Believers" on the History of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA)*. PhD. thesis.

5.4 A critical examination of Malabwanya's administration in the light of the Baptist church government and his secession from BACOMA

In assessing the secession of Malabwanya from BACOMA, six factors will be examined. Many interviewees gave a positive description of Malabwanya.¹⁵⁵ But in spite of such a description, he seceded from BACOMA.

5.4.1 The emerging cracks in the BACOMA executive committee: power shifts from the Southern to the Central and the Northern Malawi

As it has already been outlined in chapter three, there were more Baptist missionaries in Zomba and Blantyre in the 1960s and 1970s, and Baptist work grew faster in the South than in the two sister regions of Malawi.¹⁵⁶ For this reason, most of the key leaders of BACOMA during the 1970s came from the South as shown in the table below. For example, Stephen Galatiya was the treasurer for sixteen consecutive years while McFarland Njolomole Phiri was the president for nine consecutive years. From 1971 to 1987, all the secretaries for BACOMA came from Southern Malawi. Mackenzie Likatho was the secretary for six consecutive years. Malabwanya was the secretary for eight consecutive years. All these officers came from the South as indicated in the table below.

Zomba: University of Malawi. P. 404. The minutes and the interview that I had with Malabwanya revealed that Malabwanya seceded from BACOMA in 1992.

¹⁵⁵ I got the following information from the people that I interviewed. Pastor W.A.C. Chisi described him as "very systematic in delivering his sermons, always focusing on three points, a good producer of radio programmes." The same sentiments were echoed by Mr. Eliya Banda of Soche Baptist church and Mrs Chauluka of Zomba. As for Dr Hany Longwe Malabwanya "was the best secretary BACOMA has ever produced." Pastor Booker Kapalamula Banda called him "a hero, but he has one problem: he is easily frustrated." Rev Dr Felix Chingota, a Biblical scholar at the University of Malawi, is said to have a vivid memory of Malabwanya as a good preacher. I did not interview Dr Changota. I got the information from Pastor Fletcher Kaiya, the former General Secretary of BACOMA, Blantyre, on 2 July 2008.

¹⁵⁶ For instance Zomba has the largest number of Associations in Malawi. They are eight namely Zomba urban, Jali, Mpyupyu, Chingale, Domasi, Mayaka, Mikuyu and Minjale. But today Lilongwe has the largest number of churches in BACOMA.

Table 1: BACOMA's presidents, secretaries and some treasurers 1971-2008

Name	Position	Dates	Area
McFarland Njolomole Phiri	President	1971-1980 (Nine years)	South
Bamusi P. Kanowa	President	1980-1987 and 1989- 1992	Centre
WAC Chisi	President	1987-1988	Centre
Samuel Malabwanya	President	1988-1989	South
Bamusi P. Kanowa	President	1990-1992	Centre
Emmanuel Chinkwita Phiri	President	1992-1994; 2000- 2004	Centre
Rueben Nkhata	President	1994-1998	Centre
George Mwase	President	1998-2000	North
Booker K Banda	President	2004-2006	Centre
Vincent Chirwa	President	2006-2008; 2008- 2010 ¹⁵⁷	North
Steven Galatiya	Treasurer	1971-1987 (16 years)	South
William Mallungo	Treasurer	1987-1988	Central
S.J. Maya	Treasurer	1988-1989	South
Dafren G. Makhaya	Secretary	1971-1973	South
Mackenzie Likatho	Secretary	1973-1979	South
Samuel Malabwanya	Secretary	1980-1987	South
Booker K Banda	Secretary	1987-1988	Centre
Medson Kachasu Gama	Secretary	1988-1989	South
William J. Mallungo	Secretary	1989-1990	Centre
Fletcher Kaiya	Secretary	1990-1996	Centre
Akim Chirwa ¹⁵⁸	Secretary	1996-2001	North
Fletcher Kaiya ¹⁵⁹	Secretary	2001-2007	Centre

¹⁵⁷ The BACOMA constitution allows each president to serve two consecutive two year terms. I am assuming that Vincent Chirwa will finish his term in 2010.

¹⁵⁸ BACOMA established the Secretariat in 1996. Akim Chirwa was the first General Secretary to work full time on a five year contract. He was not employed through voting. His employment was based on merit. Before the secretariat was established, the secretary, like any other officer, was elected through voting. He was not an employee of BACOMA.

Simon Mkamanga ¹⁶⁰	Secretary	2007 to date	North
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But the late 1980s witnessed power shifting to the Central region in particular and the North to some extent. Baptist work in Lilongwe grew faster due to the good foundation laid by Jean and Leroy Albright.¹⁶¹ It was the Lilongwe Association that produced the first Baptist graduate pastor in 1987, namely, Emmanuel Chinkwita. Many missionaries came to Lilongwe after the city was declared the new capital of Malawi in 1975. This further diminished the influence of Zomba. In the 1980s, Lilongwe and the Northern region produced a good number of pastors with diplomas in theology unlike the old pastors who managed to obtain just a certificate in theology or were trained at the Bible school. Some of them were Emmanuel Chinkwita, Fletcher Kaiya, Akim Chirwa, George Mwase, Hany Longwe, Booker Kapalamula Banda just to mention a few.¹⁶²

But why is there regional division in BACOMA? Both in BACOMA and in Malawi, regionalism is a very complex subject.¹⁶³ Two possible causes of regionalism in BACOMA can be explained by firstly looking at the history of SBC missionary work in Malawi, and secondly, to some extent, by looking at the political landscape in Malawi during the Banda regime from 1964 to 1994. SBC missionaries were concentrated in Southern Malawi.

From a political point of view, some of the policies of the first president of Malawi, Dr. Banda, favoured the people of Central Malawi, especially the Chewa, to some extent. Dr. Banda came from the Centre. Chichewa, the language that is commonly spoken in the Centre, was declared the national language in 1968. It was the only Malawian language that was aired

¹⁵⁹ Fletcher Kaiya's contract expired in 2006. Interviews to employ the new general secretary were conducted before the BACOMA AGM in August. A suitable candidate to replace Kaiya was not identified at that time. During the BACOMA AGM, Kaiya reported that the BACOMA executive committee had not yet identified a new general secretary. Hence he was mandated to act as an interim general secretary until the next secretary was identified. This was the reason Kaiya remained the general secretary until Simon Mkamanga was employed towards the end of 2007.

¹⁶⁰ He is the first lay person to work as a General Secretary.

¹⁶¹ See chapter three of the thesis.

¹⁶² See Longwe, H.H. 2007. *Democratisation of the Christian Faith: The Influence of the Baptist Doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers on the History of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA)*. PhD. thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi. P. 401.

¹⁶³ Generally, there is a culture of silence in Malawi. People do not like to voice their views about certain pressing issues. This can be attributed to the oppressive regime of the first president Dr Banda. There is regionalism in BACOMA, but the issue is not addressed. For a detailed study about a culture of silence see Manda, D.L. 2002. *Malawi's Transition from Neo-Colonialism rule: From a Culture of Silence to a Clamour of Voices*. MTh thesis. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal.

on the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, the only radio station at that time, as well as the only language that was taught in Malawian schools before the advent of multi-party politics in 1994. Other local languages were banned. Thus Banda was promoting the Chewa culture as the Malawi culture. Central Malawi became the stronghold of the then ruling, and the only political party, the Malawi Congress Party (MCP). Furthermore, all the cabinet ministers that opposed Banda soon after Malawi got independence in 1964 were from the North and South.¹⁶⁴ When Banda took the decision to move the capital city from Zomba in southern Malawi to Lilongwe in the centre, some prominent Malawians, such as Chief Kumtumanje of Zomba, opposed him.¹⁶⁵ In 1989 Banda ordered that all teachers who originally came from the North, and were teaching in the South and Centre, should go back to their home region. In the same year, the government introduced the quota system as a basis for entry to the University of Malawi. Each district in each region was granted only a specific number of places for the university entrants.

But why were the policies of Banda regional-based? According to Williams, when Malawi became independent in 1964, Banda was against the rapid Africanisation of the civil service, because the Chewa of Central Malawi, kinsmen of Dr Banda, had produced very few secondary school graduates. Therefore, any comprehensive Africanisation would establish their rivals from Northern Malawi and some districts in the South such as Zomba and Blantyre, in senior places in the civil service.¹⁶⁶ Williams further asserts that during the colonial era, the Northern region offered introductory primary classes to a much large proportion of its young people. Thus the Northern region accounted for a higher proportion of Malawi's stock of skilled manpower and produced more entrants to the University of Malawi in relation to its population than any other part of the country.¹⁶⁷ The Northern dominance within the educated elite had long been felt keenly by the Chewa, whose educational achievement had been much less impressive.¹⁶⁸ Lwanda also affirms that since the North had an early advantage of missionary education, their social position was much stronger in the country. As such, they tended to constitute a threat to Banda's efforts of promoting his

¹⁶⁴ Kanyama Chiume, Orton Chirwa, Yatuta Chisiza and Rose Chibambo came from the North while Masauko Chipembere, Augustine Bwanausi and Willie Chokani came from the South.

¹⁶⁵ There were more "dissidents" in the Northern and the Southern regions during the Banda regime.

¹⁶⁶ Williams, D. 1978. *Malawi: The Politics of Despair*. London. Cornell university press. P. 216.

¹⁶⁷ The North is the least developed region in Malawi and the most sparsely populated. But in terms of literacy level, the North is the most literate region followed by the South. The Centre is the least literate region.

¹⁶⁸ Williams, D. 1978. *Malawi: The Politics of Despair*. London. Cornell University Press. P. 280.

tribe.¹⁶⁹ Chirwa has taken the position that the quota system was intended to manipulate the country's educational system because previously, the North, with about 12% of the country's population,¹⁷⁰ had accounted for about half of the university entrants.¹⁷¹ With only five districts in the North, against nine in the Centre and ten in the South, it meant a major reduction of Northerners making it through to the university. The selection was not based on merit.

During the 1993 national referendum on whether to adopt multi-party politics or not, the North and South voted for multi-party politics while the Centre strongly supported Banda and voted against the introduction of multi-party politics even though they lost.¹⁷² Up to this day, regionalism has not been eliminated despite the introduction of democracy in 1994.

However, one point should be clarified. Regionalism in BACOMA is a complex issue. Politics in Malawi is based on the "region of origin" of a person. But this is not necessarily the case with BACOMA. My interpretation of regionalism in BACOMA is not based on the "place of origin" but rather on the "place of residence" of a person. For instance, Pastor Fletcher Kaiya, though he comes from the Centre, is more popular in the South where he lives. Pastor Vincent Chirwa comes from the North, but he has more support in the South where he is pastoring a church in Blantyre. In 2006, after eighteen years, Chirwa was the first president to come from the "South" since Malabwanya in 1988. During the 2008 BACOMA AGM, delegates from South, "after praying and fasting," were convinced that the president and the general secretary would come from the South. Pastor Akim Chirwa sent me an email which read:

¹⁶⁹ Lwanda, J. 1993. *Kamuzu Banda of Malawi*. Edinburgh. Dudu Nsomba Publications. P. 193.

¹⁷⁰ According to the 2008 Malawi's Population and Housing Census, the total population of Malawi was 13,066,320. Of this, 45% live in Southern Malawi, 42% live in the Central Region and 13% live in Northern Malawi. Source <http://www.nso.malawi.net/> Accessed on 8 March 2009.

¹⁷¹ Chirwa, Wiseman C. 1998. Democracy, Ethnicity and Regionalism: The Malawi Experience, 1992-1996. P. 61. In Phiri, K.M. and Ross, K.R. eds. *Democratisation in Malawi: A Stocktaking*. Blantyre: CLAIM.

¹⁷² For more details about ethnicity, regionalism, language policy and the policies of Dr Banda in Malawi see also Kishindo, Pascal J. 1998. Politics of Language in Contemporary Malawi. Pp. 252-280. In Phiri, K.M. and Ross, K.R. eds. *Democratisation in Malawi: A Stocktaking*. Blantyre: CLAIM; Banda, Jande. The Constructional Change Debate 1993-1995. In Phiri, K. M. and Ross, K.R. eds. 1998. *Democratisation in Malawi: Stocktaking*. Blantyre: CLAIM; Mbaya, H.H. 1997. The History of the Roman Catholic Church in Malawi 1964-1992 With Reference to the Issue of Social Injustice: A study of Church-State Relations. MTh thesis. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal; Manda, D.L. 2002. "Malawi's Transition from Neo-Colonialism rule: From a Culture of Silence to a Clamour of Voices. MTh thesis. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal and Newell, J. A. 1995. "A Moment of Truth? The Church and Political change in Malawi," 1992. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 33, 2. Pp. 243-262.

When the delegates from the *South* were going to the Convention they were already convinced that God had chosen the president and the general secretary. Prayer and fasting confirmed and the "Lord" impressed upon them that whoever was going to *be in opposition*, would be fighting against God. If the Nkhotakota¹⁷³ convention was going to turn against God's clear direction *they were going to pull out and form another Convention*.¹⁷⁴ (Italics added).

Mrs. Jacqueline Kalenga also said that the South was prepared "*to pull out of BACOMA if the Central region decided to oppose the new general secretary and the president*."¹⁷⁵ (Italics added).

5.4.2 The resignation of Chisi and the aftermath of the 1988 BACOMA AGM

Another point worthy considering is the resignation of Pastor W.A.C Chisi and the aftermath of the 1988 BACOMA AGM. Chisi tendered his resignation as the president of BACOMA after serving less than a year in June 1988. His deputy, Malabwanya, took over. According to his letter of resignation, Chisi had too much work since he was also serving as the director of Bible Way Correspondence.¹⁷⁶ But the pressure was more than administrative work. There was a general consensus in the BACOMA executive committee that the Baptist missionaries were not helpful. The BACOMA executive committee was not happy when the missionaries sold the trucks used in the distribution of relief food.¹⁷⁷ The BACOMA executive committee wanted the missionaries to leave Malawi. But according to some members in the committee, Chisi was not doing enough to push the matter further.¹⁷⁸ Chisi went on to say that Malabwanya wanted the presidency. But Malabwanya's opinion was that he (Malabwanya) wanted an indigenous BACOMA that was led and controlled by Malawians.¹⁷⁹ Whether it is true that Malabwanya wanted the presidency or not, Chisi, who came from the Centre, tendered his resignation and Malabwanya, who came from the South, took over.

¹⁷³ The 2008 BACOMA Convention took place in Nkhotakota district in Central Malawi.

¹⁷⁴ Pastor Akim Chirwa email to the author, 29 September, 2008.

¹⁷⁵ Mrs Jacqueline Kalenga. Administrative assistant, BACOMA, secretariat. 2008. Interviewed by the author, 2 July.

¹⁷⁶ W.A.C. Chisi to BACOMA EC. 20 June 1988. Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi (BTSM) archives. He resigned in 1988 and not 1980 as indicated by Longwe. The president of BACOMA in 1980 was Pastor Bamusi P Kanowa. See Longwe, H.H. 2007. Democratisation of the Christian Faith: The Influence of the Baptist Doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers on the History of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA). PhD. thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi. Pp. 382.

¹⁷⁷ Longwe, H.H. 2007. Democratisation of the Christian Faith: The Influence of the Baptist Doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers on the History of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA). PhD. thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi. Pp. 383.

¹⁷⁸ Pastor W.A.C. Chisi. Former BACOMA president. 2008. Interviewed by the author, Lilongwe, 22 January. But Chisi was very elusive in answering questions related to the conflict with the missionaries. He talked more after I had switched off the tape recorder.

¹⁷⁹ Pastor S. Malabwanya. Founder of IBCM, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 5 July.

The 1988 BACOMA AGM took place at Jali in Zomba for the first time in fourteen years. Both Chisi and Nkhata concurred that after the resignation of Chisi, Malabwanya made every effort for the AGM to take place in Zomba, the stronghold of the Baptist church in the South, even though it was very far for the delegates from the North and the Centre. This meant that more members around Zomba and Blantyre attended the meeting. This was important when electing new office bearers. According to the constitution of BACOMA, each church had one vote.¹⁸⁰ But according to Pastor Rueben Nkhata, some churches from Zomba and Blantyre had more than one voting members.¹⁸¹ But Malabwanya said the AGM took place in the South because he wanted to introduce a rotational system based on the regions. The last time the AGM took place in Zomba was in 1974. However, once the elections were conducted, the president, the secretary and the treasurer came from the South while the deputies came from the Centre.¹⁸² According to Rueben Nkhata, some people shouted joyfully “Mwera yapambana!” (The South has emerged victoriously).¹⁸³ Thus there was regionalism within BACOMA. Regionalism became more pronounced during the 1989 dispute and the subsequent years as will be revealed in the course of the chapter.¹⁸⁴

5.4.3 Malabwanya’s volte-face

Another factor that led to the schism was Malabwanya’s change of heart to reconcile with the Baptist missionaries. Early in 1989 the Baptist missionaries sold trucks that were used for relief food distribution without consulting the BACOMA executive committee (EC). For this reason, on 29 March 1989, the BACOMA EC decided to send all SBC missionaries home.¹⁸⁵ Two weeks later the BMIM and the BACOMA EC held a meeting at the Bible School on 15 April. Present during this crucial meeting was the SBC area representative for Africa Dr John Faulkner and another SBC official Bill Phillips. In a twist of events Malabwanya and some members of the BACOMA EC apologised except for Kapalamula Banda and Alufeyo Phiri. According to Kapalamula Banda the missionaries were alleged to have influenced some key

¹⁸⁰ 1988 BACOMA Constitution, Article 5 (2) [b].

¹⁸¹ Pastor Rueben Nkhata. Former president of BACOMA. 2008. Interviewed by the author, Lilongwe, 16 January and W.A.C. Chisi. 2008. Lilongwe, 22 January.

¹⁸² Kachasu Gama to the President, 24 October 1988 BTSM, archives.

¹⁸³ Pastor Rueben Nkhata. Former president of BACOMA. 2008. Interviewed by the author, Lilongwe, 16 January.

¹⁸⁴ Since 2000, the treasurer is not elected since there is a full time accounts clerk at the BACOMA secretariat.

¹⁸⁵ BACOMA EC 29/3/89. BTSM archives and see also Longwe, H.H. 2007. Democratisation of the Christian Faith: The Influence of the Baptist Doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers on the History of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA). PhD. thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi. P. 384.

BACOMA leaders to change their stance.¹⁸⁶ Pastors Rueben Nkhata and Chinkwita Phiri were of the view that Malabwanya and Chisi played a role in the perceived betrayal of BACOMA.¹⁸⁷ Whether Malabwanya acted alone to change his mind or not is a matter of individual opinion. According to Kapalamula Banda, Malabwanya's decision to reconcile with the missionaries made him very unpopular especially in Central Malawi and created more enemies for himself. Thus his public rating started declining.

5.4.4 Missionaries' perceived lack of love

The BMIM-BACOMA meeting deepened the already sour relationship between the missionaries and BACOMA. The two bodies had not been in each other's good books for a long time.

David Barrett has argued that the failure of missionaries to understand the society, religion and psychology of the African, which is the failure to actualize the biblical concept of love, is one of the principal causes of church schisms.¹⁸⁸ Much as the SBC had good intention of spreading the gospel, it seems as if they did not live to the expectations of Malawians as far as brotherly love or philadelphia was concerned. The point that I make is not that the missionaries "hated" Malawians, but rather Malawians had different expectations from the missionaries while the missionaries had different policies. The missionaries set up two organisations, BACOMA and the BMIM. The two bodies were like two parallel rail lines that go in the same direction but never meet. I will give a few examples to illustrate this point.

As it has been noted in chapter three, Roy Davidson, a missionary in Blantyre took the unilateral decision in 1966 that Malawians should support Steven Galatiya, their "indigenous" pastor.¹⁸⁹ Malawians were not happy with this decision. Furthermore, Leroy Albright did wonderful work in pioneering Baptist work in Lilongwe in the 1960s. He was very close to the local people, even to some Baptist groups like the Achewa Providence

¹⁸⁶ Pastor B. Kapalamula Banda. Former President of BACOMA. 2008. Interviewed by the author, Lilongwe, 24 January.

¹⁸⁷ Pastor Rueben Nkhata. Former president. 2008. Interviewed by the author, Lilongwe, 16 January; and Pastor Emmanuel Chinkwita. Former president of BACOMA. 2008. Lilongwe 18 January.

¹⁸⁸ Barrett, D.B. 1968. *Schisms and Renewal in Africa: an Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Movements*. Nairobi: OUP. P. 156.

¹⁸⁹ Rachael NyaGondwe-Banda. 2005. *Women of Bible and Culture: Baptist Convention Women in Southern Malawi*. Zomba: Kachere. P. 28. See chapter three of this thesis, "The establishment of BACOMA".

Industrial Mission. This did not please some SBC missionaries in Malawi. He was transferred to Zambia in 1969.¹⁹⁰

5.5 Malabwanya's sour relationship with pastors Chinkwita and Nkhata: The case of the Institute for Church Growth

Instead of pursuing a policy that would win him more friends, Malabwanya adopted a policy that pushed his colleagues into the periphery. It seems Malabwanya wanted a strong centralized administration. His relationship with Pastors Emanuel Chinkwita and Rueben Nkhata helps to understand his character and subsequently, his secession from BACOMA.

Chinkwita and Nkhata had known each other back in the 1970s when the latter was leading Chichiri Baptist Church.¹⁹¹ When Chinkwita joined the Baptist Church it was Nkhata who baptised him. In mid 1989 Chinkwita became the director of the Institute for Church Growth (ICG) in Malawi. The ICG was an interdenominational evangelistic para-church organisation. Chinkwita and Nkhata worked together. Short term missionaries used to come to Malawi to train leaders in church affairs.¹⁹² In compliance with immigration procedures, such visitors had to be cleared under a duly registered body in Malawi. In November 1989, Chinkwita cleared the missionaries under the Baptist Bible School since the school was registered under the BMIM. The BMIM was working with local churches in Malawi through BACOMA. The Immigration Department did not make any objections. After all, Chinkwita was the deputy president and the director of the Bible School and Nkhata was the deputy treasurer of BACOMA.

But Malabwanya had a different opinion. He accused Chinkwita of operating behind his back. "He brought the visitors without my knowledge. BACOMA did not know."¹⁹³ To Malabwanya, this was a sign of insubordination. On 30 November 1989, Malabwanya wrote a letter to Chinkwita and Nkhata demanding an explanation why they cleared the visitors

¹⁹⁰ Longwe, H.H. 2000. Identity by Dissociation: The first Group to Secede from Chilembwe's Church: A History of Peter Kalemba and the Achewa Providence Industrial Mission. MTh. Thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi. P. 86.

¹⁹¹ Pastor Rueben Nkhata. Former president of BACOMA. 2008. Interviewed by the author, Lilongwe, 16 January.

¹⁹² Pastor Emmanuel Chinkwita. Former president of BACOMA. 2008. Lilongwe 18 January.

¹⁹³ Pastor S. Malabwanya. Founder of IBCM, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 5 July.

without telling him.¹⁹⁴ After waiting for two weeks without reply, he wrote another letter to the police. The second letter was not copied to the two pastors. The letter read:

Please refer to my letter of 30 November, 1989 which I wrote to Rev. E. Chinkwita and Rev. R. L. Nkhata seeking for their explanation to the above subject and up to this day they have not responded yet. This to me is a clear evidence that the two alleged were not authorized by the Convention and *what they did was illegal*.

Therefore sir, I am surrendering to you the two alleged to *deal with them accordingly*. Meanwhile, I am calling an emergency Convention Executive committee *to dismiss* them in the Convention and you will be notified¹⁹⁵ (Italics added).

The police at the Soche station were alarmed. They thought the two pastors were against Dr Banda.¹⁹⁶ To deal with them “accordingly” in the days of the dictatorial regime of Dr Banda, could mean death or detention at the notorious Mikuyu prison without trial. According to Pastor Chinkwita, the police thought that the two pastors had committed a grave crime which needed immediate attention before top government officials knew about it. For this reason, the Soche police handed the matter to the Lilongwe police since the two pastors were Lilongwe residents.¹⁹⁷

Chinkwita was summoned to appear before the police. But the police were shocked when he narrated the whole story.¹⁹⁸ There was no case to answer. Moreover, Chinkwita was well known in the area. The matter was closed as far as the police were concerned.

But Malabwanya had to live by every word of his letter. On the same day (18 December) he wrote another letter calling for an emergency BACOMA EC meeting to be held in Zomba.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ S.L. Malabwanya to Chinkwita and Nkhata, 30 November 1989. BTSM archives. The letter was copied to the Officer in Charge, the Soche Police Station, BACOMA EC, the BMIM and the registrar of Churches in Malawi.

¹⁹⁵ S.L. Malabwanya to the Soche Officer in-charge, Soche Police Station, 18 December 1989. BTSM archives.

¹⁹⁶ Pastor Rueben Nkhata. Former president of BACOMA. 2008. Interviewed by the author, Lilongwe, 16 January. There were no links between Malabwanya and the police or BACOMA and the then ruling party, the Malawi Congress Party. See also chapter five: the case of Kachasu Gama in Zomba.

¹⁹⁷ Soche Police station is in Blantyre where Malabwanya was living.

¹⁹⁸ Pastor Emmanuel Chinkwita. Former president of BACOMA. 2008. Interviewed by the author, Lilongwe 18 January.

¹⁹⁹ The agenda was the “Confusion brought about by Rev Chinkwita and Rev Nkhata and the Lilongwe Association.”

The two pastors (Nkhata and Chinkwita) were expelled from BACOMA and they ceased to be leaders of any BACOMA institution.²⁰⁰

This clash between Malabwanya with the two pastors revealed a chasm in the BACOMA EC once again along regional lines. All those who attended the emergency meeting in Zomba were from the Southern region of Malawi. Kapalamula Banda, who came from Central Malawi, did not turn up. Both Chinkwita and Nkhata²⁰¹ were from the Centre. After expelling them from the BACOMA EC, Pastors D. Lichapa and Shadreck Phiri, both from Southern Malawi, replaced them. The entire executive committee came from the South. The meeting itself took place in Zomba, the stronghold of the Baptist church in the region. Polarization in the BACOMA EC widened each day. It is also interesting to note that during this conflict only the signature of Malabwanya appeared on the letters and minutes.

5.6 The December 1989 Lilongwe Association meeting and its aftermath

Another factor that contributed to Malabwanya's secession from BACOMA was the Lilongwe Association meeting that was held from 5 to 6 December 1989. To the supporters of Malabwanya and those who followed every clause of the constitution, the meeting "was illegal. It was organised by a group of people who brought confusion in BACOMA."²⁰² To those who opposed him, the meeting was necessary for the common good of BACOMA. Others were of the opinion that Malabwanya was wrongly removed from the office.²⁰³ However, an observer needs to take a critical distance and observe the events as they unfold.

There were two factors that led to the calling of this meeting. Firstly, in June 1989 the BACOMA EC came up with twelve conditions that must be met by any person who intended to be a BACOMA leader.²⁰⁴ The most controversial one was that such a person must have pastored a church for at least four years. The Lilongwe Association rejected these resolutions. The Association further stated that it would not pay its financial contributions during the 1989 BACOMA AGM. The Lilongwe Association went on to state that it had lost confidence

²⁰⁰ BACOMA EC minute ECCO86/89. BTSM archives.

²⁰¹ Chinkwita and Nkhata were the vice-president and the vice-treasurer of BACOMA respectively.

²⁰² Namalima, A.G. to Mkaka, R.N. 11 December 1989. BTSM archives.

²⁰³ Longwe, H.H. 2007. *Democratisation of the Christian Faith: The Influence of the Baptist Doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers on the History of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA)*. PhD. thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi. P. 404.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.* P. 384. See also BACOMA EC minute ECO 56/89. BTSM archives. Here my focus is on the conditions that had a direct impact on the new pastors that had just graduated.

in the BACOMA leadership.²⁰⁵ In reply Malabwanya informed the Lilongwe Association that it would attend the 1989 BACOMA AGM as an observer without taking part in any deliberations.²⁰⁶

The second reason was the disruption and pandemonium that ensued during the AGM which took place in August 1989. The people from Lilongwe wanted to discuss the twelve points. But they were unsuccessful. Therefore, they caused mayhem. In the end Malabwanya declared the meeting closed prematurely since it was difficult to control the mob.²⁰⁷

Therefore, because of all this, some leaders in Lilongwe felt that they should do something. Looking at the correspondence, it seems Major M.A. Chinjala, who was an army officer at Moyale Barracks, and the two senior pastors Galatiya and Kanowa, played a leading role in calling this meeting. Chinjala advised the two pastors to:

...call an emergency EC meeting. The BACOMA EC should go out of the room. The delegates should debate in their absence and later on the EC should be brought in and tell them all that the house has deliberated and all the facts that compelled you to reach the conclusion that *atule pansi udindo wawo (they should resign)*²⁰⁸ (Italics added).

After receiving this letter, the two pastors (Kanowa and Galatiya) probably contacted the Lilongwe Association. This was so because the meeting that Chinjala had suggested was not called by the two pastors, but by the Lilongwe Association.²⁰⁹ Malabwanya advised the secretary of Lilongwe Association that the meeting should not take place since it was illegal.²¹⁰ But the meeting went ahead. Delegates dissolved the BACOMA executive committee and elected an interim one to run the affairs of BACOMA up to the next AGM due August 1990. Kanowa, from the Centre, was elected interim president. The meeting expressed its concern that the old committee had not given the financial report for two years.

²⁰⁵ Mkaka, R.N. to Malabwanya, S.L. 17.July 1989. BTSM archives.

²⁰⁶ S.L. Malabwanya to R.N. Mkaka, 27 July 1989. BTSM archives.

²⁰⁷ Pastor B. Kapalamula Banda. Former President of BACOMA. 2008. Interviewed by the author, Lilongwe, 24 January.

²⁰⁸ Chinjala, M.A. to Galatiya, S. and Kanowa, B. 2 November 1989. BTSM archives.

²⁰⁹ Mkaka, R.N. to all pastors, 20 November, 1989. BTSM archives.

²¹⁰ Malabwanya S.L. to Mkaka, R.N. 30 November 1989. BTSM archives.

After his election, Kanowa wrote a letter to the BMIM. He proposed to meet with them and iron out differences.²¹¹

After the Lilongwe meeting was over, Malabwanya called an emergency BACOMA EC. The meeting expelled from BACOMA all the churches that belonged to the Lilongwe Association except for Falls Baptist, Capital City Baptist and Lilongwe Baptist. The meeting also terminated Kanowa's employment as a home missionary and advised all the associations that cooperated with the BACOMA EC not to send students to the seminary.²¹² Furthermore, the "Malabwanya" meeting did not recognize the Lilongwe meeting. It was like the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Western Roman Catholic church excommunicating each other. Therefore, as 1989 ended, there were "two Conventions" though this was not official. The Malabwanya Convention in Southern Malawi was called the "Blantyre Convention" while that of the Centre and the North was popularly known as the "Lilongwe Convention." The split was imminent.

5.6.1 An assessment of the split in the light of the 1989 BACOMA Constitution and Baptist church government

According to Article 7 (c) of the 1989 constitution, the executive committee was empowered to call for an AGM at least 30 days in advance. But the Lilongwe meeting was not called by the executive committee. It was called at two week's notice. Whether it was mandated to dissolve the executive committee and elect an interim one is debatable. As for the "Malabwanya" meeting, Article 7 (2) empowered the president to call for a special executive committee meeting as Malabwanya did. But the power to dismiss any member, group of people or a BACOMA church rested in the hands of the Convention. Whether in expelling some of the Lilongwe churches from BACOMA Malabwanya acted according to the Baptist system of church government or it was a unilateral decision, is a matter of personal opinion. Did the two "Conventions" act in the spirit of congregationalism? Any conclusion that one makes will depend largely on three things: how the Baptist church government is understood, how one interprets the BACOMA constitution and whether the doctrine of necessity was the only solution in order to achieve the common good for BACOMA.

²¹¹ Kanowa, B. to BMIM administrator, 15 December 1989. BTSM archives.

²¹² Ibid.

Apart from the constitutionality of the two meetings, another crucial outcome of these meetings was the division of BACOMA along regional lines.²¹³ The Lilongwe meeting elected the president, the secretary and the treasurer from the Central region as shown in the table below. Andrew Namalima, who was elected the vice-secretary, came from Southern Malawi. He was elected in absentia. He turned down the position.²¹⁴ The “Malabwanya” meeting also sacked the vice-president and the vice-treasurer who were from Central Malawi and replaced them with those from the South. But following the 1988 BACOMA elections, the president, the secretary and the treasurer came from the South. Thus by December 1989, the BACOMA EC was explicitly divided along regional lines as shown below.

Table 2: The 1988 to 1989 official BACOMA executive committee²¹⁵

Name	Position	Area
S.L. Malabwanya	President	South
Kachasu Gama	Secretary	South
S.J. Maya	Treasurer	South

Table 3: The Lilongwe “Convention” executive committee

Name	Position	Area
Bamusi P. Kanowa	President	Centre
William Mallungo	Secretary	Centre
B. Alufeyo Phiri	Treasurer	Centre

Furthermore, Pastor Wilfred Kalenga was a home missionary in the Lower Shire, the home area of Malabwanya. He supported the “Blantyre Convention”. He could not let Kanowa, the “Lilongwe Convention” president meet with the church leaders in Chikwawa, Chapananga and Ngabu.²¹⁶

²¹³ See the previous section “The emerging cracks in the BACOMA executive committee: Power shifts from the Southern to the Central and the Northern Malawi.”

²¹⁴ Namalima A.G. to Mkaka, R.N. 11 December 1989.BTSM archives.

²¹⁵ After the committee was dissolved, it became the “Blantyre Convention.”

²¹⁶ Longwe, H.H. 2007. Democratisation of the Christian Faith: The Influence of the Baptist Doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers on the History of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA). PhD. thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi. P. 405.

By this time it was clear that the BACOMA executive committee would split. During the emergency meeting that Malabwanya called, Kachasu Gama preached on the theme “kulekana sikuchimwa” (separation is not wrong). His message was based on the separation of Barnabas and Paul as recorded in Acts 15:36-39.²¹⁷ What was needed was a final straw to break the BACOMA unity.

5.7 The Final push: the 1992 AGM and the amendment to the Constitution

As the year 1989 drew to a close, the two “Conventions” did not reconcile. Neither of them recognised the other. However, members of BACOMA seemed to have recognized the Lilongwe Convention as the official Convention. Two reasons could be suggested. Apart from receiving support from the Central Malawi, the Lilongwe executive committee was well supported by members from Northern Malawi even though the region had no member in the committee. Secondly, the Lilongwe committee was recognized by the BMIM. Kanowa, who was the president of the Lilongwe “convention”, had written the BMIM. He said that BACOMA was ready to work with them. During the 1990 BACOMA elections, the president, the secretary and the treasurer came from the Centre. Thus Malabwanya and his group were further alienated (see table 1).

The 1990 BACOMA executive committee discovered that Malabwanya and his group had misappropriated K33,762.06.²¹⁸ Crucial was the K2 634.25 that Malabwanya had received from the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) for him to go to South Korea. He did not go and he used the money for his personal needs. He accepted his mistake and promised to pay the money back. By 1992 he had paid K500.00.²¹⁹ He was put on discipline and was told not to minister at his church. But he continued to be involved in the affairs of the church and kept the BACOMA seal. After some struggle, while he was attending the funeral of his brother, the BACOMA executive committee sent Pastors Kaiya, Chirwa and Govati and a missionary to set a new locking system in the church. These pastors said that the church could be opened only if Malabwanya did not interfere in the affairs of the church.²²⁰ But Longwe, who in 1992

²¹⁷ BACOMA EC minute, 28 December 1989, BTSM archives.

²¹⁸ BACOMA EC meeting, 15 November 1990. BTSM archives. The exchange rate in 1990 was US\$1.00=MK2.00.

²¹⁹ BACOMA Annual report 28-30 August, 1992, BTSM archives. BTSM archives.

²²⁰ Pastor S. Malabwanya. Founder of IBCM, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 5 July.

was serving as a pastor at the Living Stones Baptist in Blantyre, advised Malabwanya to go to the AGM and apologise. Longwe and some pastors would support him.²²¹

All went according to the plan. At an earlier date Malabwanya apologised to the BACOMA executive committee. During the 1992 AGM, the executive committee reported the matter to the Convention. But one point became contentious. In his apology Malabwanya had stated that since he was on discipline he was not given his salary. But one delegate from his church told the AGM that this was not true. Malabwanya counter argued that he never said this. The AGM accused him of dishonesty. The AGM never discussed whether to lift the discipline or not. According to the BACOMA annual report “Zinthu zinangotheramo” (the matter just ended without any conclusion).²²² The AGM moved to another item on the agenda. Longwe and some pastors, who were prepared to support Malabwanya as it was planned, found it difficult to defend him.²²³

On 29 August, the last day of the Convention, the same AGM adopted and approved the amended constitution. This was the first amendment since the formation of BACOMA in 1972. Before the amendment, the constitution had no proper mechanisms or procedures of barring a person from holding any position in BACOMA. The amended constitution read:

The Convention shall suspend a leader holding office for two or more years provided it is passed by two thirds majority vote from a secrete ballot, if in the view of the Convention the leader in question is:

- A. Misusing or misappropriating or has misappropriated the Convention’s money or property.
- B. Using his position to gain favours from within or outside the Convention, or compelling others to go along with him in his vision deemed contrary to the objectives of the Convention.²²⁴

Whether it was a mere coincidence that the constitution was amended at the same time that Malabwanya wanted to come back, or it was intended to bar him from occupying any

²²¹ Pastor Longwe, H.H. 2008. Principal, BTSM. Interviewed by the author, 16 January.

²²² BACOMA Annual report 28-30 August, 1992. BTSM archives.

²²³ Pastor Longwe, H.H. 2008. Principal, BTSM. Interviewed by the author, 16 January. I am quoting Longwe as an oral source not his PhD thesis. It was Longwe who requested Malabwanya to apologise to the BACOMA executive committee.

²²⁴ Article 5:10 (A) and (B) 1992 BACOMA Constitution.

position in BACOMA is not known. Pastor Andrew Namalima, Malabwanya's close friend, is of the view that the constitution was amended to block Malabwanya from occupying any position in BACOMA.²²⁵ Malabwanya holds the same opinion.²²⁶ Malabwanya left before the official closing of the AGM.²²⁷ Two weeks later, after more than thirty years of service in BACOMA, he left the church. Later he formed the Indigenous Baptist Convention of Malawi (IBCM).

5.7.1 An assessment of Malabwanya's leaving BACOMA

Malabwanya was a member of the Baptist Convention of Malawi. By forming the IBCM, I would classify the IBCM as an African Instituted Church (AIC). In the following paragraphs, I will briefly explain the development of the AICs. I will use Oosthuizen's classification of the "development" of AICs relating to church discipline. I will give examples of some of the church leaders that separated from their churches because they were disciplined. Some of them were not Baptists.

In classifying the development of the AICs, G.C. Oosthuizen has mentioned that church discipline may lead to schisms.²²⁸ In 1933 the Livingstonia Mission of the Free Church of Scotland in Northern Malawi suspended Rev Yesaya Zelenji Mwasi for what the missionaries termed "insubordination" just because he questioned that certain procedures in the church were not followed. In his resignation letter he said:

...If by 'Church' [it] is meant Presbyterian denomination...a church predominated by European customs and traditions...a system of Church Government which condemn the just and justify the guilty...then I am separated from that kind of a church.²²⁹

Mwasi later formed the Mpingo wa Bafipa (Black Man's Church). In Thyolo district, southern Malawi, Chakanza has observed that Wilfred Gudu was disciplined and excommunicated for an offence that deserved no drastic action. Gudu was a lay preacher in the Seventh Day Adventist church. He questioned the Seventh Day Adventist missionaries at Malamulo mission as to why they did not discipline a man who committed adultery. In the

²²⁵ Pastor A.G. Namalima. 2008. Mayankho Baptist, Blantyre. Interviewed by the author, 30 June.

²²⁶ Pastor S. Malabwanya. Founder of IBCM, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 5 July.

²²⁷ Pastor Longwe, H.H. Principal, BTSM. Interviewed by the author, 16 January 2008.

²²⁸ Oosthuizen, G.C. 1968. *Post-Christianity in Africa: A theological and anthropological study*. London: SPK. Pp.209-221.

²²⁹ Yesaya Zelenji Mwasi. 1933. Essential and Paramount reasons for Working Independently. In Ross, K.R. ed. 1996. *Christianity in Malawi: A Source Book*. Gweru: Mambo Press. Pp 169-178. Mwasi was ordained in 1914.

end the missionaries disciplined and excommunicated Gudu “for interfering in the case.” Gudu later formed the Ana a Mulungu Church (Children of God Church) in 1938.²³⁰ Another church leader whose administration led to secession was Dr Daniel Malikebu. He was a Baptist and a leader of the Providence Industrial Mission (PIM).²³¹ Some members of his church did not like his system of church government. Because of his “unbecoming behaviour contrary to the Baptist ecclesiology, Peter Kalemba seceded from the PIM and formed the Achewa PIM.”²³²

The way Malabwanya seceded from BACOMA should be viewed from the perspective of the discipline he received and how he responded to it on one hand, and whether he preferred centralized authority to the congregational form of church government on the other. He admitted having misused church finances. The church responded by disciplining him. If Malabwanya wanted to have full control of the church, then it was difficult for him to change the Baptist polity within a short period. But the examples quoted above demonstrate that church leaders may not always accept discipline.

5.7.2 How Malabwanya understands Baptist Ecclesiology and the beginning of the IBCM

Having examined the events that led to Malabwanya’s secession from BACOMA, Malabwanya’s understanding of the Baptist ecclesiology, especially church government should be given special consideration. Furthermore, his understanding of the Baptist system of church government should be examined if it influenced him to separate from his mother church. Finally, the IBCM constitution should be analysed in brief to find out how it differs from the constitution of BACOMA.

5.7.3 Malabwanya’s concept of leadership: Congregational or Top-bottom?

The IBCM was not founded immediately after Malabwanya separated from BACOMA. He, together with Kachasu Gama, Andrew Namalima and some pastors in Zomba joined the

²³⁰ Chakanza, J.C. 1998. *Voices of Preachers in Protest: The Ministry of Two Malawian Prophets: Elliot Kamwana and Wilfrid Gudu*. Blantyre: CLAIM. P. 64.

²³¹ The PIM is a Baptist denomination in Malawi. See chapter three of this thesis.

²³² For full story of this schism see Longwe, H.H. 2000. *Identity by Dissociation: The first Group to Secede from Chilembwe’s Church: A History of Peter Kalemba and the Achewa Providence Industrial Mission*. MTh. thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi.

Independent Baptist Church (IBC).²³³ According to his statement, Malabwanya wanted to remain a Baptist. But more was at stake than just remaining a Baptist as the interview revealed.

At first *we joined* the Independent Baptist Church...there was Kachasu Gama. Namalima was there also, but he was like a chameleon. He followed *us* to Independent Baptist. Later he decided to remain with BACOMA. Others were Khamula, and Dyera. Madengu also followed *us*, but he went back to BACOMA. Only Kachasu Gama is still with *us*. But some of my colleagues encouraged *me* that *I* had led BACOMA for many years, why should *I* be under someone? Furthermore, there was a big gap between the Independent Baptist and us. Though they are Baptists, we are different in worship as well as theology. We wanted to teach them the “real Baptist tradition.” But it was not easy. We were a threat to them. I remember that the moment *I joined* the Independent Baptist, BACOMA invited the Independent Baptist pastors to the AGM. These pastors were told ‘be careful, *Malabwanya* is very clever. *He will take over* leadership from you.’ So we decided to leave them²³⁴ (Italics added).

Two reasons can be deduced from this extract why Malabwanya joined the IBC. First, it seems he wanted to teach the IBC since he was well trained from the Baptist Theological Seminary in Gweru. Some of the leaders in the IBC were trained through the Theological Education by Extension (TEE). But most of them did not have any theological training.²³⁵ Thus Malabwanya felt the obligation of teaching members at the IBC what he called “the real Baptist tradition.”²³⁶

At the beginning of this extract Malabwanya uses the pronoun “we”. But in the process of talking he changes to “I”. Everything becomes personalized. He is at the centre of everything. Thus a second probable reason why he joined and left the IBC was that he wanted to be the leader. Why should he be under someone else? After leading the nation-wide BACOMA, he could never fail to run the southern Malawi-based IBC. Pastors Nkhata, Chisi and Kachasu Gama also said that the leadership in IBC was threatened by the arrival of Malabwanya.

In giving his views about the autonomy of the local church and the leadership structure of his church, Malabwanya said:

²³³ The IBC was led by Rev. Dr Daniel Malikebu. He separated from the PIM of Rev John Chilembwe. For details see Makondesa, P. 2002. The History of the PIM. MTh. thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi.

²³⁴ Pastor Malabwanya, S. Founder of IBCM, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 5 July.

²³⁵ Pastor Kachasu Gama. Former Secretary of BACOMA and current secretary of IBCM. 2008. Interviewed by the author, 26 June.

²³⁶ I did not ask him what he meant by “the real Baptist tradition.”

...To be honest the church in Malawi cannot be totally independent, neither do we understand what autonomy or freedom is. We are Malawians. We have our culture, so too are the Whites. Their culture and ours are different. We believe that if a person is a leader or a chief *he is not tampered with*. We respect him. *Even if he is a fool, we wait until he dies*. But as for the Whites, they rebel against their leaders. But we, *Malawians, are not used to this tradition*. Our democracy and theirs are different. We are used to telling people what to do and they listen. But we are forced to follow the American system which does not work here...”

OM: What is the leadership structure of IBCM?

SM: We are like BACOMA. The only difference is that we are not ruled by the Whites. We preach according to our culture. We sing like Malawians. Another difference is that we do not tolerate anyone to *despise and demean a pastor*. If someone does this, we tell them “go and start your church!” We do not want a pastor being chased at will. This practice is not found in the Bible. Maybe in America, but even in America, it is not there. We do not want anyone to stand up and *oppose a pastor*. *The pastor is the leader*. We preach according to our culture. We select only that which is in agreement with the word of God ...²³⁷ (Italics added).

From this extract my opinion is that Malabwanya believes that a Baptist pastor should be at the top of the power structure and should be in control of the local church not the way the Baptist church is administered. The way I interpret this excerpt is that somehow Malabwanya is of the opinion that the leadership structure of the church should resemble the African traditional chieftaincy.²³⁸

5.7.4 The IBCM and the African traditional structure

Daneel has pointed out that the ecclesiological discourse of the AICs is somewhat superficial. He argues that Protestant denominations,²³⁹ from which most of the AICs emerged, devoted insufficient attention to the doctrine of the church as one body which transcends all barriers. Hence he concludes that it was natural that the “indigenous culture and social structure should have left their mark on the ecclesiology of the Independent Churches.”²⁴⁰ Oosthuizen too has pointed out the widespread tendency in Africa to interpret the church as a new community “functioning in the same way as a traditional kinship group.” He concludes that

²³⁷ Pastor Malabwanya, S. Founder of IBCM, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 5 July.

²³⁸ It is quite amazing that Malabwanya’s definition of leadership echoes Dr Kamuzu Banda’s definition of democracy. Dr Banda said “The Malawi system, the Malawi style is that Kamuzu says it’s that and then it’s finished. Whether anyone likes it or not, that is how it is going to be here. No nonsense, no nonsense. You can’t have everybody deciding what to do...Democracy in Europe cannot be democracy in Africa. Any politician, any statesman who interprets democracy in Africa in terms of the British Constitution, the American Constitution, the Swiss Constitution...does not know what he is doing. Because we are not here living under the British conditions and the American conditions. Here we have our own way of doing things, we are copying from nobody. We will adopt from outside what suits and fits the conditions of this country. See Hansard, Zomba, 24 February 1964. Quoted in Short, P. 1974. *Banda*. London: Routledge. P. 254.

²³⁹ Daneel is referring to the Protestant mainline churches that came from Europe to evangelise Africa.

²⁴⁰ Daneel, M.L. 1987. *Quest for Belonging*. Gweru. Mambo Press. P. 269.

some AICs are based on “blood relationship.”²⁴¹ It is beyond the scope of this study to find out what Malabwanya meant when he said “we worship and preach according to our culture.” Is Malabwanya, like Isaiah Shembe, another Baptist member who formed his church in South Africa, aiming at restoring to the Malawians their former cultural glory through a new church? Is he trying to select the good cultural practices and mix them with Christian beliefs?²⁴² Further research needs to be done. But two points should be noted. Firstly, in the IBCM a pastor is highly respected if not revered like a traditional African ruler. When I was interviewing Malabwanya on 5 July 2008, two men came to his house. They were members of the IBCM. I noticed that they bowed before Malabwanya and took off their hats. The IBCM has a structure that is different from BACOMA. In her study, Linda E Thomas, while studying an AIC, the St John’s Apostolic Faith Mission in Guguletu, Western Cape in South Africa, has noted that the church fused the traditional Sotho and Xhosa practices into Christianity. Some of these practices include slaughtering of cows as a form of sacrifice.²⁴³

Secondly, after the interview, Malabwanya said that he was grooming his son-in-law to take over the reigns of power as he was growing old. “I am sixty years old. I must find someone to lead the church.” This confirms his “chieftaincy” or “kinship” philosophy. In this regard Barrett has pointed out that kinship plays an important role in some AICs. He argues that some of the AICs could be called “family churches” in which congregations are led by a young brother, son or nephew of the “bishop.” He cites the Zion City Church of Mutendi in South Africa in which sons play an important role in ritual, organisational and judicial-authoritative context.²⁴⁴ As for Malabwanya his son-in-law is pursuing theological studies through correspondence with a certain college. He is living at Malabwanya’s compound and his wife is running a kindergarten. The headquarters of the IBCM is at Malabwanya’s home. Though the aim of this study is not to compare two “Baptist AICs,” lessons can be learnt from Shembe’s Church, the Nazareth Church, and a Baptist break away in South Africa. Isaiah Shembe broke away from the Baptist Church. But hereditary succession led to a

²⁴¹ Oosthuizen, G.C. 1968. *Post-Christianity in Africa: A theological and anthropological study*. London: SPK. P. 82.

²⁴² About the formation of the Nazareth Baptist church of Isaiah Shembe see Masondo, Sibusiso. 2004. Three generations of Shembe: Leadership contests within the Nazareth Baptist Church 1935-1989. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*. 118. Pp. 69-79.

²⁴³ Thomas, L. E. 1999. *Under the canopy: Ritual Process and Spiritual Resilience in South Africa*. Columbia: University of South Carolina. P. 7.

²⁴⁴ Daneel, I. 1987. *Quest for Belonging*. Gweru: Mambo Press. P. 84.

leadership crisis in this church.²⁴⁵ Malabwanya's IBCM will be tested if one day his son-in-law will take over the mantle of leadership.

5.7.5 The role of the Bible

The impact of the Bible on Malabwanya's life should be examined to find out whether it influenced him to start another church. Studying the Bible is at the centre of the Baptist ecclesiology. In Malawi, the adults, the youth and the children attend Bible classes every Sunday before the main service. Malabwanya was brought up in this tradition. It could be argued that the centrality of the Bible in a person's life gave him courage to start another church as his comments revealed.

OM: Why did you gather courage to secede from BACOMA?

SM: I was not afraid. I did not know what God had planned for me... Three Malawian pastors...locked the church. These were Chirwa, Govati and Kaiya... They closed the building thinking the building was the church, which is not true. I have built a big auditorium.²⁴⁶ I will show you. So I was not afraid... I was taught by the Baptists. The Bible says "where two or three people gather in my name," the presence of God is there. I had no other weapon, but the Bible...

Barrett has noted that schisms have occurred in areas that are predominately Protestant and where the Bible was translated into local languages at an early period. The SBC missionaries came into an area which was already evangelised by the Presbyterians, the Anglicans, the National Baptist Inc. and the Seventh Day Adventists. They found the Bible already available in local languages. But the Baptists emphasis on studying the Bible had an impact on Malabwanya's life. Thus with the Bible in his hands as the only weapon, Malabwanya was prepared to start another church. He would preach and win new converts. After all he needed no intermediaries to speak to God. Both the Bible and the priesthood of all believers had a direct impact on him. It is not uncommon in BACOMA to have a Baptist church with a dozen members without a pastor.

²⁴⁵ For details see Masondo, Sibusiso. 2004. Three generations of Shembe: Leadership contests within the Nazareth Baptist Church 1935-1989. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*. 118. Pp. 69-79; Vezi, N. B. 1992. *The development of the Shembe Church or the Church of Nazarites since 1925*. Durban: University of Durban-Westville.

²⁴⁶ Malabwanya was speaking in Chichewa. The word "nyumba" means a house. But Malabwanya used the word "nyumba" to mean a building used for worship or church.

5.7.7 The IBCM constitution: Special highlights

To understand Malabwanya's ecclesiastical views concerning church government, it is imperative to have a glance at the IBCM constitution.

While Malabwanya was at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Gweru, a certain missionary gave him a book *On the Indigenous Church*.²⁴⁷ Malabwanya fell in love with the book such that it has become his desire to implement some of the points raised therein.²⁴⁸ Since the book talks about the concept of an indigenous church, he named his church "indigenous." To him BACOMA ought to be indigenous, but this is not the case because the church is ruled directly or indirectly by the Americans. He explained that the SBC came to Malawi to establish an "indigenous" church that was supposed to be self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating. But as it turned out, the missionaries controlled the local people in order to meet their ends.²⁴⁹ He went on to argue that unlike in Zimbabwe, the SBC missionaries did not establish any viable institutions like hospitals or schools. As far as Malabwanya is concerned, this was a testimony that the missionaries had nothing to do with the welfare of the local people. According to Malabwanya, the principle of the indigenous church is that the local people should take the leading role in the running of the church according to their culture that is compatible with the gospel.²⁵⁰ With such a strong indigenous and cultural conviction, the constitution of the IBCM is very hierarchical.

In the Baptist tradition, setting up a local church does not depend on the availability of a pastor. In this case BACOMA does not have a clause in its constitution about the pastor. The BACOMA constitution does not have even the word "pastor". Even the Scottsville Baptist Church constitution in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, does not have a clause about a pastor.

But the structure of the IBCM is unique. The head of every local church is a pastor. At the very top of the IBCM there is the presiding pastor or chairman (chairperson). He is also the chairperson of the General Assembly and the Board of Trustees, the spokesperson of the church and the overseer of the church in all matters. Below him is the General Assembly. The Board of Trustees follows next. But the Board of Trustees is accountable to the General

²⁴⁷ I forgot to take down the name of the author.

²⁴⁸ Pastor Malabwanya, S. Founder of IBCM, Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 5 July.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

Assembly which is headed by the chairman. Some sections need to be highlighted. Section 9 about the presiding pastor reads:

The presiding pastor (chairman):

9:1.1 shall serve as the overseer of the church

9:12 shall have authority to ensure that everything concerning the church in spiritual or temporal matters is done in order

9:14 shall serve as the chairman of the General Assembly and the Board of the Trustees.

From this structure, the following observations can be deduced: if the presiding pastor is also the chairperson of both the General Assembly and the Board of Trustees; and the Board is accountable to the General Assembly which is headed by the presiding pastor, therefore, everything is accountable to the presiding pastor and he is accountable to no one. The word overseer in Greek is episkopos, from which we get the word bishop. Thus the chairperson is the “bishop.” He holds the church in his hands. Furthermore, according to section 12:1 the chairperson and the board hold office for five years. But they can be re-elected again for as many times as possible without any limit.²⁵¹ The chairperson or the presiding pastor of the IBCM is no other than Malabwanya. He has been in that position since the foundation of the church in 1992. This confirms his words that a leader should not be tampered with. The church should wait until he dies. Then another one will be elected or his son-in-law will take over. But as of now, no one in the IBCM has the audacity to challenge him.

5.7.6 Conclusion

Malabwanya appreciates all that the missionaries did for him by sending him to school and looking after his parents. But this is enough. He said he has lost trust in most of the SBC missionaries. Looking at his statements critically, it seems he does not want to be under the influence of outsiders. According to Section 8:1 of the IBCM constitution

The church (the IBCM) receives its authority from its members in Malawi and shall not for any other reason (other than spiritual) be influenced by, or held responsible to, or be bound by any Baptist or other church outside Malawi. Any partnership *with any other foreign organisation* (s) shall be according to the Biblical principle of everything together under Christ head, everything together in heaven and everything on earth (*Italics added*).

²⁵¹ In BACOMA, the president is limited to two two-year terms.

However, after examining his ecclesiastical views critically, Malabwanya should not be seen as a revolutionary, power hungry, anti-missionary pastor. His secession from BACOMA should be examined from the perspective of the fluidity of the Baptist ecclesiology and religious pluralism that dominate the Malawian society. Reading his statements between the lines, it seems he prefers a Malawian leading the church.²⁵² Asked if he was willing to go back to BACOMA, he replied:

SM: Well, many people say so. I believe that I do God's work. I do not know the will of God. But as of now God is not whispering to me to go back to BACOMA. If someone is not satisfied wherever they are, they should come and work with the Indigenous Baptist and correct the situation where necessary. BACOMA is under the missionaries. If I return, I may die-not physically, but spiritually. I know White people. I was born under the care of missionaries. Both my mother and my father were looked after by the missionaries. I know White people from A to Z. If they decide to do something, no matter the opposition, they will do it. I am happy where I am. I am in Gospel Link. I go to Kenya and preach in Baptist churches. I can go anywhere to preach in Malawi, even in BACOMA churches. I can go back to BACOMA if there is reform...

OM: You said you can go back if there is reform in BACOMA. Can you explain?

SM: BACOMA should sever its relationship with the Southern Baptist Convention. It must be independent. Even one Southern Baptist missionary is dangerous.

Malabwanya said he could return to BACOMA if it severs its relationship with the missionaries. However, even if he goes back to BACOMA today, he cannot have the same command as he used to have in the past though his services are greatly missed.

I would still call the IBCM a Baptist church, but with a different polity. Like the Shembe Church, its leadership structure is very hierarchical. Though it would be premature to categorise the IBCM as a family church, the church is steadily drifting in that direction. It will depend on who succeeds Malabwanya. The IBCM has eleven branches in Blantyre and Zomba. Most of the churches are in rural or semi-urban areas. Some AICs attract prominent politicians. At present one of the members who support Malabwanya is Billy Kaunda, musician cum politician.²⁵³ He was a member of the New Jerusalem Baptist Church. He is a deacon. Further research needs to be carried out in areas such as how the church relates to the state, Christology, the role of women and its liturgy.

²⁵² After the interview, he requested me to find him some White missionaries to work with. He is currently in the Gospel Link, a Baptist international evangelism organisation. In Malawi this organisation is headed by Malabwanya's close ally, Pastor Booker Kapalamula Banda.

²⁵³ Currently, he is a deputy minister responsible for tourism.

Photo 1. Pastor Samuel Malabwanya and his wife Chrissie at their home, 5 July 2008, Blantyre, Malawi.



Photo 2. Indigenous Baptist women attending Thursday women's meeting, Zomba, Malawi, 26 June 2008. The uniform resembles that of Baptist Women Union of Zimbabwe. For BACOMA Women Union, the blouse is white while the skirt, head scarf and belt are purple.



Photo 3

Pastor Malabwanya and his son-in-law, the prospective future leader of IBCM

Chapter six

Events in Zomba: the case of Pastors Kachasu Gama and Anthony Bell of the Zomba Baptist church

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the formation of the Zomba Baptist church. It also analyses Kachasu Gama's life, his call to the ministry at the Zomba Baptist church, and how he broke away from BACOMA. The second part of the chapter examines how Anthony Bell, an Afro-American pastor, was employed by the Zomba Baptist church and the factors that led the church to terminate his employment.

6.2 Pastor Medson Thomas Kachasu Gama and the establishment of the Zomba Baptist church

Pastor Medson Thomas Kachasu Gama was born about 1947 at Lambulira in Zomba district.²⁵⁴ His father, Pastor Thomas Kachasu Gama, popularly known as Kachasu Gama senior, was the first BACOMA pastor in 1962.²⁵⁵

When Bill Wester²⁵⁶ came to Zomba as a missionary in 1960, he employed Medson Kachasu Gama as his house servant, just like Kingsley employed Malabwanya in Blantyre. Wester also sent Gama to school until he finished his primary level.²⁵⁷

Wester stayed in Zomba for over twenty years as a missionary.²⁵⁸ He opened several churches in rural Zomba as far as Mayaka, about 25 kilometres away from Zomba town. But he did not open any church in urban Zomba. Kachasu Gama started sharing the gospel with

²⁵⁴ Pastor Kachasu Gama, former general secretary of BACOMA, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 26 June.

²⁵⁵ Longwe, H.H. 2007. Democratisation of the Christian Faith: The Influence of the Baptist Doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers on the History of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA). PhD. thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi. P. 52. See chapter three of this thesis "BMIM work in Blantyre and Zomba."

²⁵⁶ See chapter three of this thesis.

²⁵⁷ Pastor Kachasu Gama, former general secretary of BACOMA, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 26 June.

²⁵⁸ Wester came to Malawi in 1959 as a missionary and he took his residence in Zomba in 1960. In 1983, he was accused of ill treating Malawians and having a colonial mentality. Among other things, Wester used to give jute sacks to Malawian women to sew as part of home craft lessons. He was subsequently transferred to Salima, central Malawi, where he stayed until 1987 when he retired and returned to the USA. BACOMA executive committee minutes. 11 January 1983 and 21-22 June 1983. Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi archives.

some youths and other people in Zomba town. Many people responded positively to the gospel. Gama and the new believers used to meet in Wester's garage to study the Bible. This marked the beginning of the Zomba Baptist church. This was in 1979.²⁵⁹ Kachasu Gama became the leader of the group. Wester continued going to Jali, Mayaka and other places in rural Zomba.

But the garage was not big enough to accommodate everyone. Therefore, they started meeting at the Zomba Community Centre in 1980. In 1982, Gama went for theological training at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Gweru, Zimbabwe. He graduated with a Certificate in Theology on 23 November 1984. He continued serving the Zomba Baptist church as a pastor. The Zomba Baptist church auditorium was opened in 1988. The money for the construction of this building came from the SBC.²⁶⁰

By 1990, the church had a good number of worshippers from Chancellor College of the University of Malawi and other government departments. The church therefore introduced an English service. At first the service started as an afternoon fellowship, meeting at four o'clock. Later on some members suggested that it was better to meet at 8:00 AM. Another group continued meeting at four o'clock in the afternoon. Most of the members that met in the afternoon came from different denominations as a "fellowship". In about 1995, the afternoon service joined the morning service forming one English service. The service started at about 8:30 AM. One of the leaders was Rendell Day, a SBC missionary.²⁶¹ By the end of the year, the English service started meeting at eight o'clock in the morning while the Chichewa service started an hour later.²⁶²

It must be noted that from the beginning, the English and the Chichewa services were unique. Very few members attended both services. Most people from the Chichewa service could not understand English. Those that attended the English service, and could understand Chichewa,

²⁵⁹ According to Kachasu Gama, Wester was interested in going into the villages. Gama said that Wester did not have any desire to open a church within Zomba town near his house because he did not want people bothering him with begging. Later Wester requested Gama to find a place where Gama could worship with the new believers. The group started meeting in one of the rooms at the Zomba Community Centre hall.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Some of the leaders were Dr Alistair Ager, lecturer in Psychology, Chancellor College, the University of Malawi; Dixie Maluwa Banda, then staff associate, Chancellor College; Mr H Nkhwazi, civil servant working for the Government Press and Mr. H Topesa, an employee of the University of Malawi, central administrative office.

²⁶² Mr. H.D. Nkhwazi and Humphrey Topesa, deacons, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 25 June.

did not like attending the Chichewa service because it finished late at twelve noon, or even later. The English service had its own “members” as did the Chichewa service. Some of the people who attended the English service were not Baptists. Due to his poor command of English, Kachasu Gama never preached during the English service though he occasionally attended the fellowship. But all the leaders of the Zomba Baptist church came from the Chichewa service because it was regarded as the “main church.”²⁶³

6.3 Kachasu Gama’s conflict with the Zomba Baptist church

As mentioned in the last chapter, the Malabwanya administration²⁶⁴ had misappropriated MK33, 762.06. The pastors that were involved were Malabwanya, Maya, Kalenga and Kachasu Gama. Gama was the general secretary of BACOMA at that time.²⁶⁵ On 15 January 1991, the BACOMA executive committee summoned Kachasu Gama for a disciplinary hearing at the Baptist Media Centre in Blantyre. But he did not turn up.²⁶⁶ BACOMA alerted the Zomba Baptist church to all that Gama had done.

The Zomba Baptist church had (and still has) a nursery school. Later in 1991, the church council discovered that the funds for the school, as well as the funds of the church such as tithes, were not properly accounted for.²⁶⁷ A committee of inquiry was set up. The committee was made up of some members from the church council and others from the English service.²⁶⁸ The committee found out that there was no proper accounting of both the church and the nursery funds. According to Nkhwazi and Topesa, who were deacons at that time, many members of the church did not know how money was collected and how it was used. The treasurer of the church did not present any financial report.²⁶⁹ It was discovered that the pastor used to make personal directives on how to use the money. He could appoint certain individuals to fulfil certain tasks without the knowledge of the church. “The pastor ran the affairs of the school single handed.” When the committee reported its findings to the church,

²⁶³ Mr. H.D. Nkhwazi, deacon, Mrs. E. Chauluka, former church council member, and Mr. H Mopiha former chairperson of the school board, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 25 and 26 June.

²⁶⁴ See the previous chapter and BACOMA EC minutes, 15 November 1990, BTSM archives.

²⁶⁵ BACOMA EC minutes, 15 November 1990, BTSM archives.

²⁶⁶ BACOMA EC minutes, 15 January 1991, BTSM archives.

²⁶⁷ Mr. H.D. Nkhwazi and Humphrey Topesa, deacons, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 25 June.

²⁶⁸ All members of the church council in 1990 and 1991 came from the Chichewa service.

²⁶⁹ Mr. H.D. Nkhwazi and Humphrey Topesa, deacons, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 25 June.

the pastor was not happy. He ordered that certain individuals, especially from the English service, be expelled from the church.²⁷⁰

The church therefore decided to take action. Most of the members from the English service wanted Gama be expelled from the church while a good number from the Chichewa service were of the opinion that the pastor should be disciplined. Around April 1992, the congregation voted that the pastor should remain a member of the church, but that he should not be involved in any ministerial activities.²⁷¹ Thus he was put on discipline.

But it seemed the pastor did not accept the discipline. He reported the matter to the Malawi Congress Party²⁷² district office in Zomba. There was no connection between Gama and the party or between BACOMA and the party. During the one-party regime of Dr Banda, the party was very strong and ruthless. Any form of dissenting view was regarded as being anti-the government, anti-the party and anti-the president. Thus many people used to report the “dissidents” to the party officials on very trivial matters.²⁷³ When Gama reported the matter to the party, some of the church leaders were detained in the Zomba MCP office. However, Kachasu Gama was not reinstated. In June 1992, the BACOMA executive committee warned Kachasu Gama that he should not take ecclesiastical affairs to politicians.²⁷⁴

In spite of the warning from BACOMA, Gama did not give in. On one Sunday in July 1992, Gama used certain members of the church council to lock the church for the English service. Members of the English service worshipped outside the church. But during the Chichewa service, the church was opened since the keys were kept by some members of the Chichewa service.²⁷⁵ Gama had invited some officials of the Malawi Congress Party and some Baptist pastors within Zomba to help him settle the dispute. After the Chichewa service, a punch-up broke out between those who were against Gama and those that were for him. Some of the leading church members who opposed the pastor were taken to the MCP office once again

²⁷⁰ Humphrey Topesa, deacons and Lackwell Mwenyecheri, former church council member, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 25 and 27 June respectively.

²⁷¹ Mr. H.D. Nkhwazi, deacon, Mrs. E. Chauluka, former church council member, and Mr H Mopiha former secretary of the school board, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 25 and 26 June.

²⁷² The MCP was the only party in 1992. It was known for torturing dissidents. At that time (1992) people in Malawi were demanding for multi-party politics. The political climate was very tense.

²⁷³ Personal reminiscences. For instance, in those days it was an offence to tune to another radio station if Dr Banda’s speech was aired on the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation radio.

²⁷⁴ BACOMA Annual meeting minute 08/02, 1992. BTSM archives. The Baptist pastors were Madengu and Khamula.

²⁷⁵ Mr. Humphrey Topesa, deacons, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 25 June.

where they were severely beaten.²⁷⁶ For this reason, during the BACOMA annual general meeting in August 1992, delegates unanimously resolved that Kachasu Gama and some pastors from Zomba should not lead any Baptist church in Malawi.²⁷⁷ Like Malabwanya, Kachasu Gama seceded from BACOMA after the AGM.²⁷⁸ Half of the church followed him. All of them were from the Chichewa service. Some members left the Baptist church and joined other denominations.²⁷⁹

6.4 Some issues raised during the conflict

6.4.1 Education attainment among the Baptist pastors

In this section, I will briefly explore the impact of poor schooling among Baptist pastors and how it affected the leadership of the Zomba Baptist church. I will start by briefly looking at two controversial movements in the USA, especially in the “Deep South”, the home of the SBC missionaries who came to Malawi in 1959.

Before the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention, the American Baptists, especially in the Deep South of the USA, grappled with the anti-mission and the Campbellite controversies.²⁸⁰ Among other things, the proponents of these movements taught that the Bible colleges, paying salaries to pastors and formal education had no Biblical sanctions. Most of the supporters of the movements were not highly educated both secularly and theologically. Daniel Parker, a pastor from Tennessee, who started the anti-mission movement, did not have a formal education. McBeth writes that “these movements left an ultra-conservatism mark on the Baptists in Texas, one of the strongholds of the Southern Baptist Convention.”²⁸¹

²⁷⁶ One of the members that was beaten was the former secretary of the church, the late Mr Manyawa. He was teaching at Masongola Secondary School. Mr Mopiha was also detained, but he was not beaten. Mr. H.D. Nkhwazi, Humphrey Topesa, deacons and Mr. H Mopiha former chairperson of the school board, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 25 and 26 June respectively.

²⁷⁷ BACOMA annual meeting minute 08/02 1992. BTSM archives. The other pastors were Madengu and Khamula.

²⁷⁸ But pastor Madengu and Khamula later rejoined BACOMA.

²⁷⁹ Mr. Makocho, who was at that time a secondary school teacher, joined the Living Waters Church while Mr. Mailosi joined the Assemblies of God church. Mr. Makocho was the only person who had tertiary education that supported Gama.

²⁸⁰ The movement was started by Alexander Campbell. In 1830, he broke away from the Baptist church and formed the Disciples of Christ or the Church of Christ. See McBeth, H.L. 1987. *The Baptist Heritage*. Nashville: Broadman Press.

²⁸¹ See chapter two of this thesis under the section “Baptists in America.”

Another point that should be noted is that the SBC missionaries who came to Malawi did not encourage high level theological education among Malawian pastors.²⁸² For instance, the SBC missionaries sponsored Emmanuel Chinkwita to pursue a diploma in theology in Arusha, Tanzania in 1985. While he was in Tanzania, Chinkwita found another scholarship on his own to pursue a degree programme in theology in Switzerland. The second scholarship was not sponsored by the Baptist missionaries in Malawi. Some SBC missionaries told him that the degree was not necessary. He would be “over-educated.”²⁸³ Another Baptist member, Molly Longwe, was employed by the SBC missionaries as a lecturer at the Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi in 1996. In 2000, she was sponsored by the African Theological Initiative, Akropong, to pursue a master’s degree in theology at the University of Natal. The principal of the seminary at that time was a Southern Baptist Convention missionary. He told her that the seminary could not render any support towards her study. Her training was not on the missionaries’ programme.²⁸⁴ All Malawian Baptist pastors, except for Hany Longwe and his wife Molly,²⁸⁵ that have degrees were either sponsored by the European Baptists or by other Christian organisations. Apart from Pastor Hany Longwe and his wife, the Baptist missionaries in Malawi did not sponsor any pastor beyond the diploma level. Most of the early Malawian pastors did not even finish the primary level.²⁸⁶ Gama said that the missionaries’ emphasis was on “winning souls to Christ and opening new branches.” Kachasu Gama went on to explain that:

The missionaries used to tell me that in the USA some Baptist pastors work full time in secular jobs from Monday to Saturday. But on Sunday they are on the pulpit preaching... Some of the pastors there do not have even theological training, no diplomas, and no degrees. Only those who apply for foreign missionary work should have *ma digri apamwamba* (higher degrees).²⁸⁷

Bill Wester, a Southern Baptist Convention missionary who worked in Zomba for many years, did not open a church within Zomba city as it has already been outlined in the previous

²⁸² The irony is that the minimum qualification for the SBC foreign missionaries is a Master’s degree. The first Malawian pastor under the SBC had no theological education. He was just appointed.

²⁸³ Pastor Emmanuel Chinkwita. Former president of BACOMA. 2008. Lilongwe 18 January.

²⁸⁴ Molly Longwe, lecturer at the Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi. 2009. Interviewed by the author, 25 February. Molly is currently pursuing a PhD in theology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

²⁸⁵ The Baptist missionaries in Malawi sponsored Hany Longwe and his wife Molly to pursue a BTh at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Lusaka, Zambia, in 1994. The aim was to equip them to teach at the newly established Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi in Lilongwe.

²⁸⁶ The same trend continues even today. Most of the pastors do not have post primary education.

²⁸⁷ Pastor Kachasu Gama, former general secretary of BACOMA, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 26 June.

section. The town had many expatriates at the University of Malawi and other government departments. He did not offer pastoral services to the “educated elite.” Whether he deliberately avoided the elite community is a matter of speculation. Wester opened churches in rural areas. Pastors around these areas could barely read and write Chinyanja, the local language. While some attended the Bible school, others did not. They were appointed either by the missionaries or by the local church to be pastors according to their moral standing.²⁸⁸

Furthermore, when the English service was introduced at the Zomba Baptist church, it was the other members of the church, not Kachasu Gama, that used to preach. The church was polarized between the English and the Chichewa “speakers.” When Kachasu Gama left the church, most of those that followed him did not have post primary education. Soon after Gama left, the Zomba Baptist church decided to employ a pastor who was conversant with English and Chichewa. Pastor Oscar Matupi succeeded Gama. Later he left for further studies. The church wanted to employ the late Pastor Blackwell Duwa. But the English service rejected Duwa because he was not competent enough in English while members of the Chichewa service, most of whom were not highly educated, accepted him. In the end Duwa was not employed.²⁸⁹

The conclusion that can be drawn from the above analysis is that even though in the Baptist tradition education is not a prerequisite to the ministry, poor schooling had a negative impact on the administration of the Zomba Baptist church. Since Kachasu Gama was not familiar with the English service, he ordered that some members from the English service be expelled from the church. He regarded them as trouble-makers.²⁹⁰ It was the failure to find a well qualified Malawian pastor²⁹¹ that forced the Zomba Baptist church to employ Anthony Bell from the USA as will be seen in the next section.

²⁸⁸ Pastor Kachasu Gama, former general secretary of BACOMA, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 26 June.

²⁸⁹ Mr. Humphrey Topesa, deacons, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 25 June.

²⁹⁰ Mr. H.D. Nkhwazi, deacon, Mr H Mopiha former chairperson of the school board, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 25 and 26 June respectively.

²⁹¹ After Pastor Oscar Matupi had left Zomba Baptist Church for further studies in 2000, the church set up a pastor’s search committee. The committee was mandated to identify a new pastor. Some of the members were Prof Fiedler, his wife Rachael NyaGondwe Banda, the late Ester Phiri, Mrs E. chauluka and the author. We interviewed the late Blackwell Duwa and Rutherford Banda. Members of the Chichewa service voted unanimously to employ Duwa. But those from the English service rejected him since he could not speak good English (he had a certificate in Theology). Members of the English service opted for Rutherford Banda who had a degree in theology. However, members of the Chichewa service rejected him. [Reasons withheld for privacy sake]. Both were subsequently not employed. The church employed Akim Chirwa whose term as a general secretary of BACOMA had just expired in 2001. Chirwa had a degree in theology. In 2002 Chirwa left for the

6.5.3 Who has the final authority: the church or the pastor?

Another critical issue during the Gama administration was the exercise of power. Baptists believe that members of the church are the final authority in making decisions. However, according to Nkhwazi and Topesa, Kachasu Gama used to run the church alone. There was no financial transparency. The congregation was therefore sidelined. Instead of being congregational, it seemed his system of church government was becoming centralised. Gama also stated clearly during the interview that:

A pastor should not be treated like *munthu wamba* (any other person). A leader should be treated differently. *Chigulu cha anthu sichingapereke mfundo yomanga popanda wina wotsogolera*. (A group of people cannot give a binding resolution without one person leading them).²⁹²

This suggests that Gama saw himself as the person to lead the church. After all, he founded the church. He did not accept the final decision of the church when it voted him out. His statements seemed to suggest that he thought that he would lead the Zomba Baptist church until he retired. It should be remembered that his father was also a pastor. During the interview he further said:

A pastor in America can serve the local church for as many as thirty years until he retires. Sometimes his son takes over. But this cannot happen in Malawi. People are jealous...²⁹³

It seems that Baptist pastors believe in theory that the church is the final authority, but practically the principle is rarely followed. Somehow, Malawian Baptist pastors seem to hold the view that the autonomy of the local church means that the pastor is the leader of the local congregation.

USA to do his MTh. The church advertised the post. The church was looking for someone with a diploma or degree. Fletcher Kaiya was interviewed. But the church did not employ him because he wanted to operate from Blantyre, some 64 km away. No other Malawian pastor applied for the post. Since the church did not find a suitable Malawian pastor, it contacted UBIA, an American Christian organisation to find a pastor for the church. (See next section about Anthony Bell). It was after Anthony Bell left that Zomba Baptist Church employed Funwayo Mafuleka, who was trained at the African Bible College in Lilongwe.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

6.6 The case of Pastor Anthony Bell

6.6.1 Introduction

This section focuses on the employment and the administration of Pastor Anthony Bell. Bell was born in the state of New Jersey, USA.²⁹⁴ Before coming to Malawi, he served as an assistant pastor of one of the churches in his home state. Bell was the only non-Malawian pastor under review. Since he was leading the Zomba Baptist church, the same church that Pastor Gama led, and since his case also involved a leadership crisis, he was chosen as a case study even though he did not break away from BACOMA to form another church.²⁹⁵

6.6.2 The employment of Anthony Bell

After the resignation of Kachasu Gama in 1992, the Zomba Baptist church decided to employ a pastor that could handle both the English and the Chichewa services effectively. Therefore, in 1994, the church employed Pastor Oscar Matupi. He was trained at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Lusaka, Zambia. He served the church for seven years. In the year 2001, he resigned in order to pursue further studies. In 2002, the church employed Pastor Akim Chirwa, the former general secretary of BACOMA. However, after one year, he also resigned and went for further studies in the USA to pursue a master's degree in theology. The church was left without a pastor.

After the departure of Akim Chirwa, the church set up the pastor's search committee to identify a suitable candidate. According to the advert for the post:

Applicants should have a minimum qualification of an MSCE or Diploma in Theology or its equivalent and at least three years of active pastoral ministry at a church.²⁹⁶

However, on 6 June and 4 July 2004, the pastor's search committee reported to the church that nobody had applied for the post. The qualification requirements were high.²⁹⁷ Therefore, the committee contacted the United Brethren in Action (UBIA), an Afro-American Christian organisation based in New Jersey, USA, if it could identify a pastor for the Zomba Baptist

²⁹⁴ According to my informants, he was either in the late thirties or early forties.

²⁹⁵ Since he was serving a church that was affiliated to BACOMA, I consider him to be a member of BACOMA even though he was not a Malawian.

²⁹⁶ Letter advertising the post of a pastor at the Zomba Baptist church, 5 February 2004, the Zomba Baptist church archives. MSCE means Malawi School Certificate of Education, an equivalent of the General Certificate of Education, O level.

²⁹⁷ The Zomba Baptist church council minutes, 6 June and 4 July 2004, Zomba Baptist church archives.

church.²⁹⁸ The UBIA had in the past sent and supported Pastor Victor Covington. He was the pastor of the Blantyre Baptist church.²⁹⁹ On 24 October 2004, the committee reported to the church that the UBIA had identified Pastor Anthony Bell. The UBIA also indicated that it would pay his salary while the Zomba Baptist church had to meet his accommodation and his utility costs.³⁰⁰ Collins A. Days, the president of the UBIA Board, and Victor Covington wrote letters of recommendation.³⁰¹ Bell and his wife Monica were officially employed by the Zomba Baptist church on 4 December 2004.

6.5.3 Pastor Bell's administration

One week after assuming his duties, Bell invited all the leaders of the Zomba Baptist church for a meeting.³⁰² During this meeting, he told them that the constitution of the church was “not pastor friendly” and that the “church council was unbiblical.” He went on to argue that the church had “usurped all the powers of the pastor.”³⁰³ Within a few months, Bell made several changes to the constitution of the church and took several unilateral decisions without consulting the congregation. For example, he dissolved the church council and appointed new office bearers.³⁰⁴ With the assistance of a few leaders that were close to him, he amended the constitution of the church without the knowledge of the congregation.³⁰⁵ It is alleged that he could reprimand teachers publicly and threaten to dismiss them. He could close the school for

²⁹⁸ UBIA's mission statement is “to create and nurture a NETWORK of Christian leader, churches, ministers, businesses and associations that will impact Africa, America and indeed the rest of our world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” Some of its core activities include: evangelism and church empowerment, medical missions, education, environmental and development projects of the church, leadership development, ministry of the family and advocacy. It has other partners in Kenya. http://ubia.org/?page_id=2 accessed on 23 April 2009.

²⁹⁹ Prof Edrinne Kayambazinthu, chairperson of the Zomba Baptist School Board and an elder; Dr Dixie Maluwa Banda, member of the pastor's search committee and also an elder; and Mr. H. Nkhwazi, elder, Zomba Baptist, 2008. Interviewed by the author 9 December.

³⁰⁰ The Zomba Baptist church, council minutes, 24 October 2004, Zomba Baptist archives.

³⁰¹ Dr Dixie Maluwa Banda, member of the pastor's search committee, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 9 December.

³⁰² The leaders came from all departments the church. Some of the departments at the Zomba Baptist church are the Youth, Evangelism, Women, Education and many more. Before Bell amended the church constitution, authority was vested in the congregation. The congregation had such powers to elect leaders. In the education department, Prof Edrinne Kayambazinthu said that the pastor could attend meetings as an ex-officio member. He was to provide spiritual leadership and instil Christian values. But the pastor could not authorise any payments of money, he could not teach and he could not dismiss any employee.

³⁰³ Prof Edrinne Kayambazinthu, chairperson of the Zomba Baptist School Board and Dr Dixie Maluwa Banda, member of the pastor's search committee also an elder and vice chair of the school board, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 9 December.

³⁰⁴ Some of the new office bearers were Prof Garton Kamchedzera, a Law professor at the University of Malawi became an elder; Sunganani Manjolo was appointed youth pastor. Others were Mike Butao and Rex Mlenga. Liz Pandya was appointed as the new treasurer and Mrs. Chauluka became one of the bank signatories. Zomba Baptist Minutes, 4 July 2005, the Zomba Baptist church archives.

³⁰⁵ Mr. H.D. Nkhwazi, deacon, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 10 December. Bell sent me the copy of the constitution by email on 18 February 2009. He admitted to having written a new constitution because the old one “was not biblical.” Email, Anthony Bell to the author, 16 February 2009.

a day in order to carry out very minor repairs at the school without consulting parents and the education board.³⁰⁶ He dismissed a watchman.³⁰⁷ He could use the school's petty cash without proper accountability. He also started receiving the school fees. Because of his actions, the head teacher and the treasurer of the school also started having access to the money for the school. The head teacher squandered MK250 00.00 and the treasurer owed the school about MK300 000.³⁰⁸ The church later told the treasurer to step down. Bell also dissolved the school board. The Zomba Baptist church used to run the Adopt a Child project which was sponsored by the Hungarian Baptists.³⁰⁹ But Bell is said to have sidelined the committee responsible for the task and started running the project himself.³¹⁰ He forbade women to sleep and cook within the church premises when they conducted their meetings.³¹¹ His argument was that the church was a "sanctified place."³¹² One day he told Chande, one of the workers at the church, to dig a rubbish pit. But since it was late in the afternoon, Chande decided to do the work the following day. Bell was annoyed when he discovered that Chande had not done the work assigned to him. He slapped Chande in the presence of the teachers and pupils. "Bell rushed into his house and took a machete to hack Chande to pieces. Chande had to flee for his life."³¹³

Because of the way Bell was running the church, many people stopped going to church.³¹⁴ Some resigned from their positions. It was alleged that the teachers at the Zomba Baptist primary school threatened to resign because of the way Bell treated them. When some members of the church reasoned with Bell to change his leadership style, he used to "rebuke those that advised him on the pulpit the following Sunday."³¹⁵ Dixie Maluwa Banda and Edrinnie Kayambazinthu informed the UBIA all that Bell was doing.

³⁰⁶ Zomba Baptist church has a full primary school apart from the kindergarten.

³⁰⁷ Prof Edrinnie Kayambazinthu, chairperson of the Zomba Baptist School Board and Dr Dixie Maluwa Banda, member of the pastor's search committee and vice chair of the school board, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 9 December.

³⁰⁸ Church minutes, 10 July 2005, the Zomba Baptist church archives. By the end of 2005, US\$1=MK140.00.

³⁰⁹ The project used to support street children by providing them with food.

³¹⁰ Mr. H.D. Nkhwazi, deacon, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 10 December.

³¹¹ Apart from the church auditorium, the Zomba Baptist complex has other rooms that are used for the Sunday school classes.

³¹² Women at the Zomba Baptist church, 2008. Focus group discussions, 9 December.

³¹³ The Zomba Baptist church extraordinary meeting report, 5 October 2005; the Zomba Baptist church women focus group discussions; Dr Dixie Maluwa Banda and Mr. H Nkhwazi, elders. 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 9 December.

³¹⁴ Mary Maluwa Banda resigned as the church treasurer; Pamela Chikoti, the executive assistant to the pastor also resigned just to mention a few. The Zomba Baptist church minutes, 23 July 2005.

³¹⁵ Prof Edrinnie Kayambazinthu, chairperson of the Zomba Baptist School Board and Dr Dixie Maluwa Banda, member of pastor's search committee, 2008. Interviewed by the author, 9 December.

At the beginning of October 2005, Bell and his wife left for the USA for their annual holidays. On 5 October, after Bell had left, the church held an extraordinary leaders' meeting. The meeting agreed to hold an annual general meeting on 6 November 2005. One of the items on the agenda was to decide whether Bell should continue to be the pastor of the Zomba Baptist church or not. However, on 26 October 2005, the UBIA sent an email to Bell that it had stopped sponsoring him. The email was copied to the Zomba Baptist church. The email read:

UBIA has come to the decision that we cannot support your plans to return to Malawi at this time and we therefore cannot provide further cover of financial support ...³¹⁶

In spite of this email from the UBIA, the proposed meeting went ahead. However, when the meeting was about to start on 6 November, Prof Garton Kamchedzera, one of the leaders of the church who was said to be a close associate to the pastor, told the church that the general secretary of BACOMA had just phoned him saying that the Zomba Baptist church should not conduct the meeting without the presence of one of the BACOMA officials. The meeting was postponed to 20 November 2005 so that Pastor Fletcher Kaiya, the general secretary of BACOMA, should be present.³¹⁷ On 20 November 2005, fifty-five people voted against Bell while only sixteen voted for him.³¹⁸ In this way, Bell was no longer the pastor of the Zomba Baptist church.

However, while he was in the USA, Bell had found another sponsor. He was supposed to return to Malawi on 28 November 2005. But he returned a week earlier, on 23 November. It is alleged that only the leaders that were close to him knew that Bell was already in Malawi on this day.³¹⁹ Looking at the emails, it seemed he was aware of all that was taking place at the Zomba Baptist church. His wife, Monica, was also aware of the proposed 6 November meeting.³²⁰ She had indicated that they had "purchased an air ticket not sponsored by the UBIA." In another email she said "The Lord sent us to Malawi and until he says go back to

³¹⁶ Email, UBIA to Anthony Bell, copied to Zomba Baptist Church, 26 October 2005, the Zomba Baptist church archives.

³¹⁷ Mr. H.D. Nkhwazi, deacon, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 10 December.

³¹⁸ Zomba Baptist Church minutes, 1 December 2005, Zomba Baptist archives.

³¹⁹ Mr. H.D. Nkhwazi, deacon, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 10 December.

³²⁰ Email, Monica Bell to Mike Butao, 31 October, 2005.

New Jersey or wherever we will stay home in Zomba.”³²¹ On 16 November, Bell wrote Mike Butao, one of his confidantes to “pray for those who are fighting the work of the Lord... bless them that fight against you...we are coming home soon”...³²²

On 27 November 2005, the church was taken aback. Bell was on the pulpit preaching. During the English service, he preached against those that were against him. “I am being persecuted for Christ! I am prepared to die for Him.”³²³ The service ended without any problem. But during the Chichewa service, as Bell was preaching, some members of the congregation were roaming and murmuring outside the church auditorium. Just after he had finished preaching, one of the deacons, Mr. Mopiha, stood up to ask a question. Before he did so, Bell told him to sit down and not to say anything. This caused mayhem in the church between the supporters of Bell and those that were against him. They fought. Bell called the police. The matter was settled later. But the church did not re-employ him.

Later Pastor Bell and his wife moved to Lilongwe. BACOMA then employed Monica Bell as the director of Baptist Publications in Lilongwe where she did a commendable job of improving the condition of the publication house. The Church of Central African Presbyterian employed Bell as the director of an orphanage also in Lilongwe. But within a few weeks, the employees at the orphanage complained that Bell was ill treating them. They staged a strike demanding his removal.³²⁴ He has since left for the USA.

6.5.4 Pastor Bell’s concept of the Baptist church government

During the first meeting that Bell had convened in December 2004, he openly expressed his opinion that he did not like the Zomba Baptist church constitution. Mr. H Nkhwazi described Bell as having an “attitude problem”. According to Nkhwazi, since Bell came from the USA, “he seemed to have the view that he knew everything.” Nkhwazi further stated that Bell had “an uncompromising and a determined spirit.”³²⁵ During the church meeting of 23 July 2005, Bell said that people who disagreed with him were “most welcome to leave the church.”³²⁶ In

³²¹ Email Monica Bell to Garton Kamchedzera, 27 October 2005, Zomba Baptist archives.

³²² Email Anthony Bell to Mike Butao, 16 November 2005, Zomba Baptist archives.

³²³ Dr Dixie Maluwa Banda, member of the pastor’s search committee, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 9 December.

³²⁴ The Zomba Baptist church women, focus group discussions; Mr H Nkhwazi and Dr Dixie Maluwa Banda, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 9 December.

³²⁵ Mr. H.D. Nkhwazi, deacon, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 10 December.

³²⁶ The Zomba Baptist church minutes, 23 July 2005, Zomba Baptist archives.

an email to Garton Kamchedzera, it seemed he was informed that the church was no longer interested to employ him as a pastor. But Bell wrote:

We would come back [to Malawi]...Our work is not finished there; we will finish the work God called us to do.³²⁷ In another email to Mike Butao, Bell wrote: we are coming home soon...I *will deal with those* who did not do what I asked.³²⁸ (Emphasis added).

In order to live by his words that the Zomba Baptist church constitution was “not pastor friendly,” Bell came up with an almost new constitution.³²⁹ The amended constitution gave a glimpse of Bell’s concept of administration. According to the old constitution, the authority of the church was vested in the congregation. It was the members of the church that elected leaders in various committees. But according to Bell’s amended constitution, the pastor

- I. Shall be the leader of the church in all activities
- II. Shall appoint all committees as well as all chairpersons of each committee
- III. Shall have the right to dismiss any employee³³⁰

Thus according to this constitution, the pastor was above everyone. Like the constitution of the Indigenous Baptist Convention of Malawi of Pastor Malabwanya, the pastor was like a “bishop.” Bell defined the Baptist church government as:

Congregational...whose authority rests locally...Each Baptist church is autonomous and handles its own affairs with respect to ordaining and electing its leaders, managing its own finances and developing its own ministry and growth...

Responding to my question: ‘who should lead the church?’ Bell said: “Christ as leader of His church he placed a structure we are to adhere to... This structure includes the office of Bishops and or Pastors given to the church by Christ to fulfil his purpose on earth...” When I asked him to give his opinion about the Zomba Baptist church constitution, Bell replied: “Zomba Baptist Church did have a constitution but it was *not Biblical nor was it Baptist*. So we started working on a suitable constitution. I have a copy and I am send [sic] it along with these answers... I found the pastors [in Malawi] were afraid of the people because they paid

³²⁷ Email Anthony Bell to Garton Kamchedzera, 31 October 2005, Zomba Baptist Archives.

³²⁸ Email Anthony Bell to Mike Butao, 16 November 2005, Zomba Baptist Archives.

³²⁹ According to Mr. H. Nkhwazi, the amendment of the constitution was confidential.

³³⁰ The Zomba Baptist church 2005 Constitution, Article V (B) I-III.

the salaries of the pastors. God will deal with those people. Remember a pastor works for God and he *must tell the people* what God wants him to say...*No deacon or Elder can run a church* they are to assist the pastor in the work of the ministry” (Eph 4)³³¹ (Emphasis added).

Though Bell believed that the leadership of each Baptist church is localised, his statements seemed to imply that the pastor should lead the church not deacons, elders or the congregation. During the focus group discussions, women indicated that the pastor used to run the church alone with the assistance of a few leaders that were close to him. Because of his leadership style, women complained that their ministry³³² declined. They said that Bell and his wife had no regard for some of the Malawian cultural practices that the local people valued such as giving gifts to a newly born baby, locally called “kuwona chikuta”, weddings and many more. These activities were scrapped from the women’s programme.³³³

In trying to find out why Bell behaved in this way, Pastor Akim Chirwa, who stayed in the USA for three years, said that most African American Baptist pastors run their churches like the “chief executives.” They have titles such as “bishops.”³³⁴ Probably, this explains why Bell ran the Zomba Baptist church in this manner.

Bell is said to have amended the constitution of the Zomba Baptist church with the assistance of a few members that were close to him. In order to amend the constitution, the requirement was that:

The church shall have power to add to, revise, rescind and amend the terms of this Constitution by a two-thirds majority vote of members present at a church general meeting, if notice of the meeting has been given to all members at least one month previously specifying the exact term (s) of such proposed modification.³³⁵

In this way, one would argue that Bell did not follow this provision of the constitution.

³³¹ Email, Anthony Bell to the author, 16 February 2009.

³³² By ministry, the women were referring to their role in the church, their activities or their participation in the local church.

³³³ See also the section about the women’s report of the extra ordinary church leaders meeting on 15 October 2005, Zomba Baptist church archives.

³³⁴ I did not have the chance to interview Anthony Bell. But he responded to some of my emails as indicated in this chapter.

³³⁵ Article XIII (1): Modification of the Constitution. The Zomba Baptist Church Constitution.

6.5.5 The role played by the Zomba Baptist church and the BACOMA executive committee

Bell was employed without being interviewed. He was just recommended to the church. It could be argued, to a certain degree, that the leadership of the Zomba Baptist church knew nothing or very little about him. In one of his emails to me Pastor Bell said:

I come from a place where church leaders were not honest with the members; this is where God called me from. So when I got to Malawi I was ready to deal with the things I saw. *The people in Zomba did not know me and their thoughts about an American were based on White Americans they have had contact with.*³³⁶ (Emphasis added).

It is the opinion of the Zomba Baptist church women during the focus group discussions that some leaders of the Zomba Baptist church fed Bell with wrong information. The women also said that the congregation had high expectations from Bell as an American. After he had slapped Chande and threatened to kill him, the leadership of the church did not discipline him. However, when the treasurer of the Zomba Baptist School misappropriated the funds for the school, the church told him to step down. He was also told to pay back the money. But why did the congregation fail to take any action against Bell? The women during the focus group discussions explained that the reason for not disciplining Bell was that he had amassed a lot of power. The women went on to assert that a few months after Bell assumed his duties as the pastor of the Zomba Baptist church, some key leaders had resigned or stopped going to church because of his leadership style. In this way the leadership of the church became ineffective, or as the women put it “Bell paralysed the leadership of the church.”³³⁷ The congregation passed a vote of no confidence only after Bell had gone to the USA.

As for the BACOMA executive committee, the general secretary was present when the church voted not to re-employ Bell. However, according to the Baptist system of church government, since each congregation is autonomous, the secretariat is not involved in employing a pastor of the local congregation. In Malawi, the BACOMA secretariat does not employ a pastor to serve a local church. However, as soon as Bell arrived in Malawi on 23 November 2005, he had discussions with the general secretary.³³⁸ What transpired between

³³⁶ Email, Anthony Bell to the author, 16 February 2009.

³³⁷ Zomba Baptist women, focus group discussions, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 9 December. The Chichewa word that the women used was “*anasokoneza*” which means “he confused.” Literally, the sentence should read “Bell confused the leadership of the church.”

³³⁸ Zomba Baptist Church minutes, 1 December 2005. Zomba Baptist archives. Members of the Zomba Baptist church discovered later that Bell had an audience with the general secretary as soon as he arrived from the USA.

the two men is not known. After the Zomba Baptist church terminated Bell's employment, BACOMA employed his wife as the director of the Baptist Publications. BACOMA knew all that Bell had done in Zomba, but no action was taken against him. But when Malabwanya and Kachasu Gama had misappropriated the funds, the BACOMA executive committee took a leading role in disciplining them. When Pastor Chilokoteni had problems with his church (see the next chapter), the general secretary played another leading role that led to the disciplining of Chilokoteni. The BACOMA executive committee delegated the Zomba Baptist Association to handle the case of Bell. All the leaders at the Zomba Baptist church were told to step down. The Zomba Baptist Association ran the affairs of the Zomba Baptist church for some months. It was alleged that the Association sided with the supporters of Bell.³³⁹ Later on the Association disciplined only those that opposed Bell.³⁴⁰ But the BACOMA executive committee did not discipline Bell as it had done with the other pastors.

6.5.6 Conclusion

Though Bell did not secede from BACOMA, his case illustrates the same problem of church government. Like the other four pastors, it could not be an over exaggeration to say that Bell had complete control of the church contrary to the Baptist polity. The case of the Zomba Baptist church has revealed that though power belongs to the members of the local church, pastors remain influential. This in turn creates tension between the pastor and the congregation. According to the constitution of the Zomba Baptist church, any amendment to the constitution required "a majority vote of two thirds by members of the congregation present at a general meeting." But Pastor Bell seemed to have overlooked this constitutional provision (see section 6.4.4 above).

³³⁹ Email, Prof. E Kayambazinthu, chair of the Zomba Baptist School Board to the author, 9 February 2009.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

Photo 4: Pastor Medson Kachasu Gama, general secretary of IBCM at his home, Mpunga, Zomba. 26 June 2008.



Pastor Anthony Bell with his two daughters, Mia and Meno. The pastor emailed this photo to me on 16 February 2009.

Chapter Seven

The definition and the power of a Baptist pastor: the case of Pastors Amos Rhobo and Samuel J. Chilokoteni

7.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on two pastors in Blantyre: Amos Rhobo and Samuel Chilokoteni. It examines their leadership and how they seceded from BACOMA. Pastor Amos Kanyama Rhobo is the youngest³⁴¹ of the four Malawian pastors under review. He is the only one that was trained in Malawi at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Lilongwe. Pastor Samuel Joseph Chilokoteni is the oldest of the five pastors in this study and one of the oldest pastors in BACOMA. He seceded from BACOMA at the age of seventy. Considering his age, and the fact that he was the BACOMA chaplain at the Mozambican refugee camp in Ntcheu, as well as being a home missionary in Karonga, his story was chosen as a case study. The chapter also assesses the role played by BACOMA and the Blantyre Baptist Association in trying to resolve the misunderstandings.

7.2 The beginning of the Misesa Baptist church

In April 1994, the Jimmy Hodges Ministries³⁴² came to Blantyre on an evangelistic mission. The team preached in several areas within the city. One of the places was the Blantyre Teachers' College, which is within the Misesa residential area.³⁴³ The area had some members who belonged to the Baptist church such as Jack Mwale and his wife, the Rhobo family, the late Mr. Mavungile, Mr. Butao and many more.³⁴⁴ They were members of the Soche Baptist Church. The new members, who responded to the gospel during the Jimmy Hodges mission tour, joined this group. Since the number was big enough, they started assembling in one of the classrooms at the Soche Hill Secondary School, not as a full church, but as a Preaching Point.³⁴⁵ Thus the Misesa Baptist church began as a Preaching Point of the Soche Baptist church.

³⁴¹ He declined to reveal his age, but my estimate is that he is over fifty years old.

³⁴² This is an American Baptist Evangelism organisation.

³⁴³ Eliya Banda, former secretary of Blantyre Baptist Association, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 29 June.

³⁴⁴ Jack Mwale, secretary of Misesa 2 Baptist church, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 1 July.

³⁴⁵ In the Baptist system, a Preaching Point is a young church that is under the spiritual guidance of a mother church. Once members have been taught and become well-grounded in the Baptist beliefs, the Preaching Point becomes a full church. It can invite its pastor. Some of the Preaching Points that were given to the Soche Baptist

In December 1995, members of the Misesa Preaching Point wrote a letter to the Soche Baptist church that they should be recognised as a full church. The Soche Baptist church had no objections and accepted. Jack Mwale was the secretary while Amos Rhobo was one of the deacons.³⁴⁶ In 1997, members of the Misesa Baptist church raised some money and constructed a church building. Some of the money came from the Jimmy Hodges Ministries. But due to poor construction, the building collapsed.

7.3 Amos Kanyama Rhobo as the pastor of the Misesa Baptist church

Rhobo worked for the Valmore Paints Malawi Limited for fifteen years. He retired in 1995. He had joined the Baptist church in 1978. He was a member of the Soche Baptist church. In January 1996, he went for theological training in Lilongwe at the Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi.³⁴⁷ According to Jack Mwale, when Rhobo returned home from the seminary during the holidays, he started asserting himself and giving directives as the pastor of the church. Mwale went on to explain that there was no agreement that Rhobo would become the pastor of the Misesa Baptist church once he went to the seminary. The Misesa Baptist church did not appoint him as the pastor of the church.³⁴⁸ But according to Rhobo, since he went to the seminary, he was equipped to be a pastor. Therefore, it was befitting for him to lead the Misesa Baptist church.³⁴⁹ The congregation was divided into two camps: one faction supported Rhobo while the other supported Mwale.³⁵⁰ In 1998, the Misesa Baptist church formally split into two: the Misesa 1 Baptist church and the Misesa 2 Baptist church.

church during the Jimmy Hodges mission tour were Nancholi, Nansembe and Mbayani. Eliya Banda, former secretary of Blantyre Baptist Association, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 29 June.

³⁴⁶ Eliya Banda, former secretary of Blantyre Baptist Association, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 29 June.

³⁴⁷ Pastor Amos Rhobo, pastor Misesa Fundamental Baptist, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 1 July. Rhobo graduated in 2000 with a Certificate in Theology.

³⁴⁸ Jack Mwale and Butao said that Rhobo could close the door of the church for members who came late for church service.

³⁴⁹ Pastor Amos Rhobo, pastor Misesa Fundamental Baptist, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 1 July.

³⁵⁰ During the interview, Mwale said that for three times he applied for theological training. But he was not successful. He said a certain pastor “blocked him.” But the Baptist Theological Seminary is very independent. It is not influenced by outsiders in enrolling students. According to Eliya Banda, the former secretary of the Blantyre Baptist Association, and a member of the Soche Baptist church, Mwale and Rhobo were rivals for a long time. Each wanted to lead the Misesa Baptist church or Preaching Point. In 1994-1995, Rhobo was the chairman [chairperson] of the Misesa Preaching Point while Mwale was the secretary. But during the 1995 BACOMA AGM, delegates passed a resolution to abolish the position of the chairperson in BACOMA churches because some people were becoming “life chairmen” and they used to block churches any attempt to employ a pastor. The position of the secretary of the church became more powerful. Since Rhobo became a mere deacon, Mwale, as the secretary of the church, became more influential. Hence there was the rivalry between the two. Eliya Banda, former secretary of Blantyre Baptist Association, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 29 June.

Rhobo led the Misesa 1 Baptist church while Mwale led the Misesa 2 Baptist church. The two churches are about five hundred metres apart.

After the split, the Misesa 1 Baptist church constructed another church auditorium in 2000. At this time BACOMA formed a partnership with the Oklahoma General Baptist Convention of the USA. The Misesa 1 Baptist church received some money from Oklahoma through BACOMA to be used for the construction of the church building.³⁵¹ Apart from the money from Oklahoma, the Misesa 1 Baptist church also received some money from Mrs. Daisy Gabler,³⁵² a friend of Rhobo, who was living in Texas.

7.4 The role played by the Blantyre Association and BACOMA to resolve the conflict

As the two churches remained divided, the Blantyre Baptist Association tried to resolve the conflict, but did not succeed. In 2001, the chairperson of the Blantyre Baptist Association was the late Pastor Blackwell Duwa.³⁵³ The Association passed a resolution that the two churches should unite and Rhobo be the pastor of the united church.³⁵⁴ But the Misesa 2 Baptist church argued that Rhobo imposed himself as the pastor. He was not appointed. Mwale and the Misesa 2 Baptist church accused the Blantyre Baptist Association of favouring the Misesa 1 Baptist church since Duwa was a classmate of Rhobo.³⁵⁵

As the wrangle dragged on, Mwale approached the BACOMA secretariat for money to buy iron sheets to roof another church auditorium since Rhobo was in control of the first one. The secretariat gave him MK18 000.00.³⁵⁶ According to pastor Fletcher Kaiya, who was the general secretary of BACOMA at that time, the Misesa 1 Baptist church building that the Rhobo faction used belonged to BACOMA since the Misesa 1 Baptist church received the money from the Oklahoma General Convention through BACOMA. Therefore, Rhobo had no right to claim that the building was his. In turn, Rhobo and the leadership of the Misesa 1

³⁵¹ BACOMA financial report, 2001. BACOMA Secretariat, Blantyre.

³⁵² Daisy Gabler to Rhobo, 3 October 2000. Daisy came to Malawi during the June 2000 International Commission mission. But Daisy did not indicate how much money she sent to Rhobo. It was the opinion of Rhobo that most of the money came from Daisy. The International Commission is another Baptist evangelism organisation.

³⁵³ Duwa, like Rhobo, was once a member of the Soche Baptist church. He was also a classmate of Rhobo at the seminary in Lilongwe.

³⁵⁴ Blantyre Association minute, 12 August 2001. Eliya Banda, former secretary of Blantyre Association, private collection.

³⁵⁵ Eliya Banda, former secretary of Blantyre Baptist Association, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 29 June.

³⁵⁶ Jack Mwale, secretary of Misesa 2 Baptist church, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 1 July.

Baptist Church accused BACOMA of favouring Mwale and the Misesa 2 Baptist church. The two churches were never reconciled. Finally, on 20 April 2004, the Misesa 1 Baptist church wrote a letter that it had seceded from BACOMA. The letter read:

...Our pastor is never regarded as a pastor by Misesa 2. Misesa 1 and Misesa 2 have become enemies instead of friends. We have never worked together as Baptists under BACOMA...BACOMA has failed to assist us. Instead they have encouraged this bad system of having two sister churches at one place by financing the other side with MK18 000.00. Therefore, we the so called Misesa 1 Baptist church have decided to remain Baptist but not under the umbrella of BACOMA with effect from 20/04/04 (Gen. 13:8-9). As Baptists we are ready to work with BACOMA as friends in Christ, but we are still looking for any other Baptist Church to work with...³⁵⁷

After the Misesa 1 Baptist church seceded from BACOMA, BACOMA tried to get the church building back from Rhobo since he was no longer a BACOMA affiliate.³⁵⁸ But Rhobo argued that a larger proportion of the money for the construction of the building came from his friend in the USA and not from BACOMA. Therefore, BACOMA could not claim that it was the owner of the building. Rhobo went on to argue that BACOMA was *interfering in the affairs of the Misesa 1 Baptist church*.³⁵⁹ (Emphasis added). In the end BACOMA gave up. The building had no title deed.

After Rhobo and the Misesa 1 Baptist church seceded from BACOMA, they joined another Baptist denomination, the Samaritan Baptist Church³⁶⁰. But after two months, they withdrew their membership from the Samaritan Baptist Church and joined the Fundamental Baptist Church of Malawi.³⁶¹ Rhobo is the treasurer of the board of the trustees for the Fundamental Baptist Church. He also serves as a teacher at the mobile³⁶² Fundamental Baptist Bible School.

³⁵⁷ Misesa 1 to BACOMA. 20 April 2004. BACOMA Secretariat archives.

³⁵⁸ Pastor Amos Rhobo, pastor Misesa Fundamental Baptist, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 1 July.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ I do not have details about this church. More research needs to be done.

³⁶¹ The church is headed by an American Baptist missionary, Bill Ashbury. He has been living in Malawi since 1998. In the Fundamental Baptist Church, women do not preach in the presence of men. Amos Rhobo, pastor, Fundamental Baptist of Malawi. 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 1 July.

³⁶² It is called "mobile" because the school does not have permanent buildings. The teachers go and teach in various places.

7.5 An evaluation of the conflict at the Misesa Baptist church

7.5.1 The definition of a Baptist Pastor

In this section, I will try to analyse who a BACOMA pastor is and assess how this affected the leadership of the Misesa Baptist church. According to Pastor Fletcher Kaiya, some years ago, the BACOMA annual general meeting resolved that a person intending to be a pastor should “at least undergo training at any of the Baptist Bible schools in Malawi even though BACOMA tried as much as possible to phase out the Bible schools.”³⁶³ The resolution was aimed at accommodating some members of BACOMA that were being trained at the Bible schools that were run by the Baptist missionaries under the Board of the Seminary. The resolution was also passed in order to restrain some leaders of the churches who claimed to be pastors even though they did not have any theological training. However, according to the Baptist system, it is not automatic that a person becomes a pastor after completing his or her theological training. The motto of the Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi is to “Equip God’s called men and women for the ministry.”³⁶⁴ The seminary does not make a person a pastor. One becomes a pastor only after having been called by a local church.³⁶⁵ There is no definition of a pastor in the BACOMA constitution. The definition is at the discretion of the local church.³⁶⁶ Furthermore, in the Baptist system, one does not need to be ordained or licensed to be a pastor. BACOMA does not assign a pastor to work in a particular parish. In some congregations, in the absence of a pastor, one of the deacons conducts the Holy Communion service.³⁶⁷ Some members in BACOMA still maintain that theological training is not all that important for a person to be a pastor. There are some pastors that do not have

³⁶³ Fletcher Kaiya, former general secretary of BACOMA, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 2 July. The administration of the Bible Schools is complicated. The schools are under the Board of Seminary. The board does not work with the BACOMA secretariat or the BACOMA executive committee. Rather the board works with the Baptist Missionaries in Malawi. Yet the Board of the Seminary is under the BACOMA executive committee. The Board of the Seminary and the Baptist missionaries insist that the Bible Schools should continue while BACOMA is not in favour of the schools. Not all congregations in Malawi are in favour of the Bible Schools. From personal observations, there are some members in BACOMA who insist that what matters for a person to be a pastor is the calling and not the training. There is this tag of war. From personal observations, there are some members in BACOMA who insist that what matters for a person to be a pastor is the calling and not the training. There is this tag of war.

³⁶⁴ The Baptist Seminary in Lilongwe has some female students.

³⁶⁵ Hany H. Longwe, Principal, Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi, 2008. Interviewed by the author, 14 January.

³⁶⁶ One church in Blantyre has a woman as its pastor.

³⁶⁷ I have observed this practice at the Zomba Baptist church in Malawi and at the Scottsville Baptist church in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. But in Malawi, the pastors’ fraternal (a grouping of BACOMA pastors), not the BACOMA AGM, passed a resolution some years ago that only a pastor should conduct the Holy Communion and the baptismal services. From personal observations, it seems BACOMA is gradually becoming formal and hierarchical as the years go by. There are a good number of pastors, especially in Lilongwe, who wear clerical collars. This was not the case some ten years ago. In Lilongwe, I know one pastor who rarely gives a chance to the laity to preach. In most cases, a lay person preaches only if that pastor is away. Again the leadership structure in some churches resembles that of the Presbyterians.

any theological training. The argument is that the ministry is a calling from God.³⁶⁸ At the same time, some “seminary” trained pastors tend to look down on the “non-trained” or the “Bible school” trained pastors as not fully qualified pastors.³⁶⁹ The former general secretary of BACOMA, Fletcher Kaiya, is a strong advocate of theological education. His emphasis on theological education created him many enemies in BACOMA during his term as the general secretary. Thus in BACOMA there is a tension between those who interpret, in a narrow sense, the priesthood of all believers and those who try to set standards that an aspiring pastor should meet such as theological education.³⁷⁰ The general trend in BACOMA is that once a person goes to the seminary, they are regarded as “abusa or baliska” (pastors). During the interview Rhobo had this to say:

OM: You said that you split in 1998. This was while you were still at the seminary?

AR: Yes.

OM: When did the church invite you to be their pastor?

AR: Which church?

OM: The Misesa Baptist church.

AR: I went to the school that trains pastors. I was being trained as a pastor. It was my duty to lead the church... Though I had not finished my studies at that time, I had to take the lead. I was sent to the seminary so that I should become a pastor.³⁷¹

Thus much as Baptists believe that a person becomes a pastor after being called by the local church, the system is rarely adhered to. If a person goes for theological training, he or she is regarded as a pastor. Rhobo regarded himself as a pastor when he was still a student and before he was employed by the local church. For Rhobo, what qualified him as a pastor was the training that he received at the seminary. But as for his opponent, Jack Mwale, his argument was based on “the calling,” that the Misesa Baptist church did not call or employ Rhobo as the pastor. However, Rhobo was not the only person who regarded himself as a

³⁶⁸ There is no single formula of establishing that someone is being called to the ministry. The calling depends largely on how an individual feels. Those who feel that they are “being called to the ministry”, apply for theological training either at the seminary or at the Bible schools. They may also talk to their pastors to give them spiritual insight. But before any person goes to the seminary or the Bible school, the local church writes a letter of recommendation to the seminary that the candidate is a committed Christian. If a person is invited to serve as a pastor, it is up to an individual to accept or turn down the invitation. Some opt to be mere evangelists. Others work in Christian or non-Christian organisations.

³⁶⁹ In turn, the “Bible School” trained pastors, who serve in rural areas, accuse the seminary trained pastors of not planting churches. Almost all seminary trained pastors serve in the urban or the semi-urban areas in already established congregations. Very few pastors manage to open new branches in the urban areas.

³⁷⁰ From personal observations, I have heard some members of BCOAMA arguing that “we want to maintain our tradition as Baptists; we do not want to be like other denominations.”

³⁷¹ Pastor Amos Rhobo, pastor Misesa Fundamental Baptist, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 1 July.

pastor when he was still a student. When I was working at the Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi in Lilongwe, I observed that most students used to write “Rev”....before their names. They argued that they were not “deacons”, but pastors. But the Principal of the seminary kept on reminding them that they were not pastors.

7.5.3 The ownership of church property

Another contentious issue during this conflict was the ownership of the church building that the Misesa 1 Baptist church was using. The views of the two former general secretaries of BACOMA, Akim Chirwa and Fletcher Kaiya, as well as the constitution of BACOMA should be examined for a better assessment of this conflict.

According to Pastor Akim Chirwa, there are three categories of buildings within BACOMA. Firstly, all the buildings or institutions that were set up by the Baptist missionaries and they have since been handed over to BACOMA, have title deeds³⁷² in the name of BACOMA. These are the church auditoriums, the Baptist Publications, the Baptist Farm,³⁷³ the Baptist Clinic, the Baptist Theological Seminary and the Baptist Media Centre. BACOMA is the legal owner. Should the members of any congregation that uses a church building with a title deed decide to secede from BACOMA, BACOMA has the legal right to retain the building. But the members are free to join any denomination of their choice. Secondly, Chirwa went on to explain that there are some church buildings that are under BACOMA, they have title deeds, but in the name of the local church. These are the Blantyre Baptist church and the Capital City Baptist church. BACOMA is not the legal owner of these two church buildings even though the members of the Blantyre Baptist church and the Capital City Baptist church are affiliated to BACOMA. Lastly, there are the church buildings that were constructed by local people, but have no title deeds. They might or might not have received any material or financial support from BACOMA. The members of these congregations, whose church buildings have no title deeds, are affiliated to BACOMA. The majority of the church buildings in Malawi fall under the third category. According to Chirwa, BACOMA cannot claim ownership of such church buildings. Chirwa concluded that if BACOMA supported the

³⁷² However, not all buildings have title deeds. The Baptist Guest House has got them. As for the Baptist Theological Seminary, the process is underway.

³⁷³ A farm is not a building. But it has a title deed and there are buildings on the Baptist Farm in Balaka.

Misesa 1 Baptist church financially, it was “like the father helping one of his sons.”³⁷⁴ But Pastor Fletcher Kaiya, Chirwa’s successor, took the position that the building at the Misesa 1 Baptist church belonged to BACOMA since the Misesa 1 Baptist church was affiliated to and received support from BACOMA.³⁷⁵

However, according to article 10 of the BACOMA constitution

B. All building(s) whose ownership is extended to the churches by the Convention or Mission shall remain the property of the Convention or Mission.

C. The Convention and or Mission shall withdraw privileges of using building (s) if:

- I. The church does not remain constant with Baptist beliefs, customs and doctrine in faith and practice.
- II. The church decides to leave the Convention for any reason.
- III. The church is dissolved.³⁷⁶

The views of the two BACOMA officers indicate the challenge of interpreting the BACOMA constitution on one hand and how the autonomy of the local church is understood on the other. Rhobo complained that BACOMA was “interfering in the affairs of the Misesa 1 Baptist church.” It seems, as far as Rhobo was concerned, that the Misesa Baptist church was an autonomous church. The BACOMA officials were regarded as “outsiders” who were “interfering” in the church’s affairs. To what extent can a local church claim to be autonomous? Does that claim entail that the church buildings belong to the local churches or to BACOMA? Rhobo’s statement showed how the concept of autonomy of the local church is understood in BACOMA. A good number of members in BACOMA think that autonomy means being independent. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that BACOMA does not provide any financial support for the maintenance of church buildings that have the title deeds in the name of BACOMA. Everything is done by the local church. Most of the church buildings in Malawi are constructed by members of the local church without any support from BACOMA. Looking at the clauses of the BACOMA constitution quoted above critically, it seems as if BACOMA is gradually trying to have more control over the local

³⁷⁴ Pastor Akim Chirwa, former General Secretary of BACOMA, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Lilongwe, 18 July. Chirwa was of the opinion that there was no need for BACOMA to claim the ownership of the church building at the Misesa 1 Baptist church.

³⁷⁵ Fletcher Kaiya, former general secretary of BACOMA, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 2 July. Chirwa is of the view that only if a property has a title deed in the name of BACOMA, does it belong to BACOMA. But Kaiya is of the opinion that any building or property whose members are BACOMA affiliates, whether there is a title deed or not, belongs to BACOMA.

³⁷⁶ The BACOMA Constitution, Article 10, B and C, 1-3.

churches.³⁷⁷ This tendency grew stronger during the term of Fletcher Kaiya as General Secretary of BACOMA.

Another observation is that the Misesa Baptist church started as a Preaching Point of the Soche Baptist church. According to the Baptist system, the Soche Baptist church, as the mother church, was supposed to hand over its leadership to the members of the Misesa Baptist church to show that they were able to run the affairs of the church alone and that they were able to support their pastor. But instead, the leadership of the Misesa Baptist church wrote a letter to the mother church that they had decided to stand alone. Somehow it seems as if members of the Misesa Baptist church were influenced by the concept of the autonomy of the local church. The Misesa Preaching Point regarded itself as autonomous.

7.6 The case of Pastor Samuel Joseph Chilokoteni of the New Jerusalem Baptist Church

Having looked at the events at the Misesa Baptist church, attention should focus on Pastor Samuel Chilokoteni. He was born in 1933 in Traditional Authority Chapananga, Chikwawa district, in southern Malawi. Apart from Chichewa and English, he is very fluent in Shona. He went to Zimbabwe with his parents in 1943 and came back in 1947. He went again in 1950 and returned to Malawi in 1975. While in Zimbabwe, he worked for the Standard Bank and the Castle Brewery as a messenger.³⁷⁸

Chilokoteni joined the Baptist church in 1978. Five years later, he went to the Gweru Baptist Theological Seminary in Zimbabwe in 1983 and graduated with a Certificate in Theology in 1985. He worked as a Home Missionary in Karonga, northern Malawi, from 1986 to 1989 and as a chaplain among the Mozambican refugees at Biriwiri in Ntcheu district, central Malawi, from 1989 to 1993.³⁷⁹ Chilokoteni was the pastor of the New Jerusalem Baptist church for almost ten years from 23 December 1993 to 2003 when he seceded from BACOMA and joined the Fundamental Baptist Church of Malawi.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁷ The ownership of the buildings in BACOMA is complex. For instance, Pastor Booker Kapalamula Banda in Lilongwe has constructed one of the biggest churches in Malawi through his friends in the USA. BACOMA contributed nothing. The church is built on his piece of land. He has a kindergarten, a primary and a secondary school on the same piece of land. Does this church building belong to BACOMA? Suppose Pastor Kapalamula decides to secede from BACOMA, will BACOMA claim the ownership of the buildings?

³⁷⁸ Pastor Samuel Joseph Chilokoteni, Chiswe Fundamental Baptist Church, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 2 July.

³⁷⁹ BACOMA Annual Report, 1994. BACOMA Secretariat, Blantyre.

³⁸⁰ Pastor Samuel Joseph Chilokoteni, Chiswe Fundamental Baptist Church, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 2 July.

7.7 Chilokoteni's administration and how he seceded from BACOMA

As it has been indicated in chapter five, after Malabwanya seceded from BACOMA in August 1992, the New Jerusalem Baptist church was left without a pastor for over a year. The deacons were running the church. But the moment he became the pastor of the New Jerusalem Baptist church, Chilokoteni dissolved the church council. According to Fletcher Kaiya, at one point the BACOMA annual general meeting passed a resolution concerning the leadership in the Baptist churches. According to this resolution, "members who married without the blessing of the church were not supposed to be leaders or deacons."³⁸¹ Some of the leaders at the New Jerusalem Baptist church had not done this. Thus Chilokoteni implemented this resolution and dissolved the church council. It is alleged that he was running the church himself and dictated all the affairs.³⁸² During the interview, Chilokoteni admitted to having dissolved the church council because "some of the leaders had stayed for many years in their positions."³⁸³ Apart from this, Chilokoteni also told his church not to support BACOMA since the BACOMA secretariat was not helping the local churches.³⁸⁴ Because of these misunderstandings, the BACOMA secretariat set up a task force. The task force found that:

Chilokoteni used to appoint leaders in the church. He was one of the signatories to the church's bank account. He could borrow money from the church but without proper mechanisms of paying it back. Whenever people asked him about the newly appointed leaders, he could charge at them saying that as a pastor he was mandated to do that, and he had listed names of certain members to leave the New Jerusalem Baptist church and told them to go and worship elsewhere.³⁸⁵

BACOMA advised Chilokoteni that he should not be one of the signatories of the church's bank account and that he should try as much as possible to allow members of the church to take part in the running of the church.³⁸⁶ But he remained one of the signatories.

³⁸¹ Pastor Fletcher Kaiya, former general secretary of BACOMA, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 2 July. Whether this resolution was taken seriously in other BACOMA churches is not known. After all, marriage is not a sacrament in the Baptist tradition.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Pastor Samuel Joseph Chilokoteni, Chiswe Fundamental Baptist Church, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 2 July.

³⁸⁴ Pastor Fletcher Kaiya, former general secretary of BACOMA, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 2 July.

³⁸⁵ BACOMA Committee of Inquiry report, the BACOMA secretariat, Blantyre 22 November 2002.

³⁸⁶ Pastor Fletcher Kaiya, former general secretary of BACOMA, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 2 July.

7.8 The issues concerning the schools and the mini bus

Two other contentious issues that surfaced when Chilokoteni became the pastor of the New Jerusalem Baptist church were the ownership of the schools and the operation of the mini bus that the church had bought. Soon after he became the pastor of the New Jerusalem Baptist church, Chilokoteni established an orphanage. He also started a primary and a secondary school in 1995. One day, as he was sharing the gospel in the Newlands suburbs, he met Miss Irene Moses, a Malawian living in England. She became a member of the New Jerusalem Baptist church. She went to Chikwawa, Chilokoteni's home and saw some of the orphans that the pastor was keeping.³⁸⁷ When she went to England, she sent some money and clothes to support the orphans and the schools. It is alleged that it was at this time that the pastor started claiming that the schools belonged to him while some deacons argued that the schools belonged to the church.³⁸⁸

Miss Moses also sent £500.00 in 2001. The church decided to buy a mini bus with a view of developing an income generating activity. The son of the pastor was operating the mini bus.³⁸⁹ This did not go well with some of the members of the church. According to Pastor Andrew Namalima, the former vice president of BACOMA, the pastor's son stopped operating the mini bus and someone else took over. But the second person could generate even less money than the pastor's son. This compounded the conflict. In the end, the church decided to sell the mini bus and closed the church's bank account.³⁹⁰ This led to an open conflict. The supporters of the pastor and those who were against him fought in the church during a Sunday service. Village's headman of the area, Mr. Chemboma, wrote a letter to the general secretary of BACOMA. The letter read:

We would like to inform you that the first ever church to be established in our village is the Baptist church. But now it is no longer a church. It is a boxing club. People are fighting instead of worshipping the Lord. We thought that as a church, you have been a light in our community. But we have seen people being hurt. Some lost teeth. The case had been reported to the police. Some people were locked up. If you do not take any action, I am going to authorize my people to just close the church.³⁹¹

³⁸⁷ Pastor Samuel Joseph Chilokoteni, Chiswe Fundamental Baptist Church, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 2 July.

³⁸⁸ Pastor A Namalima, former vice president of BACOMA, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 30 June.

³⁸⁹ Pastor Samuel Joseph Chilokoteni, Chiswe Fundamental Baptist Church, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 2 July.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ The village head man Chemboma to BACOMA General Secretary, 12 March 2003. BACOMA Secretariat archives.

A delegation from the Blantyre Baptist Association went to the New Jerusalem Baptist church and met with the pastor and the church leaders. But the Association failed to bring the two sides together. Finally, the general secretary convened an emergency BACOMA executive committee meeting. The committee resolved that Chilokoteni should step down as the pastor of the church. He was given MK19 000.00 as terminal benefits for his services. According to Fletcher Kaiya, “the BACOMA executive committee directed that I should take over the running of the church.”³⁹² Chilokoteni then decided to leave BACOMA. He joined the Fundamental Baptist Church of Malawi. He was later elected the chairperson of the board of trustees.³⁹³

7.9 Some issues raised during the conflict at the New Jerusalem Baptist church

While the major source of misunderstanding at the Misesa Baptist church was the legitimacy of Rhobo as the pastor of the church, two contentious issues at the New Jerusalem Baptist church were the powers of a pastor and the financial management or mismanagement.

In analysing Chilokoteni’s secession from BACOMA, I will use Oosthuizen’s analysis of the causes of schisms in churches. G.C. Oosthuizen writes that denominational or ecclesiastical disputes are some of the contributing factors that lead to the schisms. He cites examples such as the disciplinary measures, the misuse of church finances, the lack of opportunity given to the laity to lead and many more.³⁹⁴ In spite of believing in the priesthood of all believers and the autonomy of the local church, it seems Chilokoteni did not give the laity adequate opportunity to take part in the running of the church. Chilokoteni used to appoint leaders of his choice. Like Pastors Chintala of the Zambia Baptist Association, Malabwanya and Kachasu Gama of Malawi, Chilokoteni also misused the funds for the church.³⁹⁵

³⁹² Pastor Fletcher Kaiya, former general secretary of BACOMA, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 2 July.

³⁹³ The Board of Trustees consists of six members. Below the board, there is the executive committee which is made up of twelve members. Fundamental Baptist of Malawi Constitution, Article C (1) and D (1). Probably, he was elected the chairperson a year after he joined the Fundamental Baptist Church of Malawi. The church is confined to the southern Malawi with a few branches in Blantyre, Chikwawa, Chiradzulu, Thyolo and Zomba.

³⁹⁴ Oosthuizen, G.C. 1968. *Post-Christianity in Africa: A theological and anthropological study*. London: SPK. Pp. 209-221. See also Daneel, I.M. 1987. *Quest for Belonging*. Gweru: Mambo Press. Pp. 72-73. Hastings, A. 1971. *Mission and Ministry*. London: SPK. Pp. 208-209.

³⁹⁵ One Baptist pastor in Blantyre argued by quoting Malachi 3:10 “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house...” He said the Bible says “bring the money into the storehouse” which is the church and not the bank. Most people stopped paying their tithes. Personal reminiscences.

Furthermore, like Malabwanya, Kachasu Gama, Anthony Bell and Rhobo, Chilokoteni also believed that a pastor should rule the church. Asked why pastors leave BACOMA, he said:

Pastors quit BACOMA due to some influence from the deacons. They [deacons] create *an opposing force* working against the pastor. They undermine *his authority*. The pastor is there to give counsel to the church. But certain *deacons become too powerful*. They think they are also pastors. As a result they do not have any regard to the pastor, not even giving *him respect*... Pastors leave [BACOMA] because the leaders focus on the church with the aim of *underrating the pastor*. Such leaders want to become pastors even though there is already one. As a result, there is a certain *power* that rules the church. In the end the pastor does *not rule*. Our leaders from the Convention just come without giving clear advice. But the real *power* is in the deacons and others in the church. The *pastor becomes powerless* ³⁹⁶ (Emphasis added).

In this excerpt Chilokoteni has used the words “power”, “authority” and “rule” several times. Probably, this could explain why he dissolved the church council and appointed the leaders to show that he had the powers. This was contrary to the Baptist system of church government. Because of this, it seems he saw the deaconate as creating an “opposing force,” “underrating him” and hence he became “powerless.” A thought provoking question that can be posed is: to what extent can a Baptist pastor exercise power? Rhobo and Chilokoteni joined the Fundamental Baptist Church of Malawi. The constitution of this church gives more powers to the local pastor than the BACOMA constitution. Women in the fundamental Baptist Church of Malawi do not preach in the presence of men. The deacons are under the pastor in the Fundamental Baptist Church of Malawi while in BACOMA it is the opposite.³⁹⁷ As for the Malabwanya’s church, the constitution of the IBCM also gives more powers to the local pastor which is not the case with BACOMA. Furthermore, the constitution that Anthony Bell wrote also gave more powers to the pastor. Thus there are similarities between the structures of the Fundamental Baptist Church of Malawi, Indigenous Baptist Convention of Malawi and the constitution that Pastor Anthony Bell wrote. All these differ significantly from the structure of BACOMA.

It is significant to note that BACOMA does not employ pastors. There is no pension scheme for the pastors. But when the BACOMA executive committee convened an emergency

³⁹⁶ Pastor Samuel Joseph Chilokoteni, Chiswe Fundamental Baptist Church, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 2 July.

³⁹⁷ Article B (2) of the Fundamental Baptist Constitution reads “The Deacons of our churches shall serve their pastor and their churches.” As for the pastor “he shall remain the chairperson of the church unless he is found guilty of breaking one of the rules as stipulated in 1Timothy 3:1-7 (Article A [4]).

meeting, Chilokoteni was told to step down. BACOMA, not the New Jerusalem Baptist church, gave him MK19 000.00 as his benefits for his services. When Malabwanya asked BACOMA to give him his terminal benefits for his services, BACOMA turned down his request.³⁹⁸ Kaiya said that the BACOMA executive committee “imposed” him on the New Jerusalem Baptist church as the new pastor. It is the opinion of Chilokoteni that Kaiya was interested in leading the New Jerusalem Baptist church.³⁹⁹

Photo 5: Pastor Samuel Joseph Chilokoteni aged 75 (2008), chairperson of board of trustees, Fundamental Baptist Church in Malawi at his home, Chiswe, Blantyre, 3 July 2008. Seen in the background are his house and bricks for the construction of the church. The church will be constructed on his plot where he is standing.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸ Longwe, H.H. 2007. *Democratisation of the Christian Faith: The Influence of the Baptist Doctrine of the “Priesthood of all Believers” on the History of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA)*. PhD. thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi. P. 404.

³⁹⁹ After the interview, Pastor Kaiya told me that the New Jerusalem Baptist church was giving him almost three times Chilokoteni’s salary. Kaiya did not give a logical reason why BACOMA gave Chilokoteni MK19 000.00. (In 2003 US\$ 1=MK80.00).

⁴⁰⁰ Chilokoteni will construct this church on his plot, a few metres away from his house. The headquarters of the IBCM is on the plot of Pastor Malabwanya, next to his house. Pastor Andrew Namalima of the Manyankho Baptist church in Blantyre (a BACOMA affiliate), has purchased a piece of land some 200 metres away from his house where he will build a new church auditorium in his home village. When I was doing my research in 2008, the Manyankho Baptist church building was constructed on his plot, less than twenty metres away from his house. Pastor Booker K. Banda, a very influential pastor in BACOMA, has constructed a very big church building on his plot in Lilongwe. Are these family churches? Is it possible for another pastor to serve in these churches? Do members of these congregations have the audacity to employ another “energetic” pastor to replace pastors such as the 76 year old Chilokoteni? The Roman Catholic Bishops retire at the age of 75 years. It seems there is no age limit in the Baptist church. All this illustrates how the concept of the autonomy of the local church is understood in BACOMA.



Chapter Eight

8.1 Comparing the schisms in South Africa and Zambia with those in Malawi

This chapter provides a summary of similarities and differences between the schisms in South Africa, Zambia and Malawi. The racial policy of the BUSA was the major factor that led to the formation of the two black Baptist groups: the TBU and the BCSA. As Kretzschmar writes, the BUSA preached and practiced segregation of the black and the white within their local congregations as well as national structures.⁴⁰¹ Thus in 1976, the BUSA demarcated the Baptist churches and the Baptist associations according to the linguistic boundaries. Christians in Transkei and Phondoland felt that this was a duplicate of the South African government geo-racial divisions. When the BUSA failed to address the concerns of the TBU, the latter seceded from the Union.

8.2 The schisms in South Africa

The Afrikaans-speaking Baptist church opposed any move to eradicate apartheid in the BUSA. Blacks and whites had different theological colleges. For this reason, during the December 1987 Convention, the BCSA stated that since it was not equal to the BUSA in many ways, its desire was to stand on its own, develop its own skills and leadership.⁴⁰² In this way, race, not necessarily Baptist church government, played a major role in the schisms in South Africa. Mogashoa has affirmed that “the BUSA gave the BCSA the association status in 1967. Though the BUSA was multi-racial, it was not *non-racial*. The BUSA used finance and theological education as core areas through which control over *the black pastors* could be exercised.”⁴⁰³ (Emphases added).

8.3 The schisms in Malawi and Zambia

But the situations in Zambia and Malawi were different. Though there were traces of racial tensions in both countries, the underlying factors that led to the schisms were church polity and the financial mismanagement. In Zambia, Peter Chintala had misappropriated the funds of his church, the Zambia Baptist Association. The church, as the final authority according to the Baptist system, had to discipline him. He was subsequently dropped as the general

⁴⁰¹ Kretzschmar, L. 1992. The Privatisation of the Christian faith Among South African Baptists: With particular Reference to its nature, Extent, Causes and Consequences. PhD. thesis. Cape Town: University of Cape Town. P.210.

⁴⁰² Ibid. p. 271.

⁴⁰³ Mogashoa, H.M. 1998. Institutionalised segregation: an overview of the Black Baptist Clergy's seclusion from Mainstream Power Structures 1859-1988. *Studia Historicae Ecclesisticae* XXIV. P. 50.

secretary. Like Malabwanya, Kachasu Gama and Chilokoteni in Malawi, Chintala did not accept the discipline. He decided to leave the Zambia Baptist Association and formed his own church.

Furthermore, the executive committee of the Baptist Convention of Zambia wanted more administrative powers over member churches. This was strongly opposed by the BMZ. The BMZ regarded this as an infringement on the autonomy of the local churches. The two churches failed to reach any agreement. This eventually led to the formation of the Baptist Fellowship of Zambia.

In Malawi and Zambia pastors seceded from the mother churches after they were disciplined. In both countries, though the conflict did not take place at the same time, the underlying tension was similar. There was a tense relationship between the Southern Baptist Convention missionaries and the nationals, based on church polity and race. Both Conventions (BACOMA and the BCZ) were founded through the missionary work of the SBC missionaries who came from Zimbabwe in 1959. Furthermore, in both countries the concept of the autonomy of the local church played a decisive role. The conclusion that can be drawn from these two countries is that the fluidity of the Baptist ecclesiology, especially the structure of the church, and the financial mismanagement, were the major factors behind schisms. To some extent, the relationship between the SBC missionaries and the nationals was also a contributing factor.

Another observation is that in Malawi and Zambia, all the pastors or groups of Christians that seceded from their mother churches joined another “Baptist” denomination, or they formed a “Baptist” denomination.⁴⁰⁴ When Peter Chintala seceded from the Zambian Baptist Association, he formed the Free Baptist Church of Zambia. When some members broke away from the Baptist Convention of Zambia, they formed the Baptist Fellowship of Zambia. When Samuel Malabwanya and Kachasu Gama seceded from BACOMA, they joined the Independent Baptist Church. Later they withdrew their membership and formed the Indigenous Baptist Convention of Malawi. When Amos Rhobo seceded from BACOMA, he

⁴⁰⁴ Even in South Africa, Isaiah Shembe broke away from the Baptist Church and formed the Nazareth Baptist Church. For details see Masondo, Sibusiso. 2004. Three generations of Shembe: Leadership contests within the Nazareth Baptist Church 1935-1989. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*. 118. Pp. 69-79; Vezi, N. B. 1992. *The development of the Shembe Church or the Church of Nazarites since 1925*. Durban: University of Durban-Westville

joined the Samaritan Baptist Church. Later, he withdrew his membership and joined the Fundamental Baptist Church of Malawi. When Samuel Chilokoteni seceded from BACOMA, he joined the Fundamental Baptist Church of Malawi. All of them did not join the already established mainline non-Baptist denominations such as the CCAP, the Anglican, the Seventh Day Adventist and the Reformed Church of Zambia (RCZ). Probably, they did not join these denominations because the ecclesiology of the denominations mentioned above is different from that of the Baptist church. Another observation is that all the pastors mentioned above occupied prominent positions in their new denominations as illustrated in the table below. Some of them, such as Malabwanya and Kachasu Gama, have occupied their positions since the foundation of their denomination.

Table 3: a summary of the findings in BACOMA and Zambia

Pastor	Cause of conflict	Action taken	Results
S. Malabwanya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centralised administration Financial mismanagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disciplined by BACOMA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Malabwanya disregarded the BACOMA resolution He seceded from BACOMA and formed IBCM He was the founder, president and chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the IBCM
M. K. Gama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centralised administration Financial mismanagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disciplined by BACOMA Disciplined by the Zomba Baptist church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disregarded both resolutions Fighting in the church Gama seceded from BACOMA and joined IBCM, half of the members of the church followed him He became the secretary of the IBCM
A. Rhobo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centralised administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BACOMA and the Blantyre Baptist Association failed to resolve the conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> He challenged BACOMA to take the church building The Misesa Baptist church split into two Rhobo seceded from BACOMA and joined the Samaritan Baptist, and later on he joined the Fundamental Baptist Church of Malawi He became the treasurer of the Board of Trustees
S. Chilokoteni	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centralised administration Financial mismanagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disciplined by BACOMA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> He disregarded BACOMA's decision Fighting in the church Chilokoteni Seceded

			<p>from BACOMA and joined the Fundamental Baptist Church of Malawi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He became the chairperson of the Board of Trustees
A. Bell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centralised administration • Authoritarian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voted out by the Zomba Baptist church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He disregarded the church's decision • Fighting in the church • Bell left for Lilongwe, then for the USA
P. Chintala (in Zambia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial mismanagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sacked as the general secretary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He disregarded the decision of the church • He formed the Free Baptist Church of Zambia • Founder of the church

Chapter Nine

9.1 Conclusion

This chapter gives a summary of the findings and tries to suggest some recommendations.

That several secessions have occurred in the main line churches in Africa is well documented.⁴⁰⁵ One of the many causes of such schisms has been the delay by the Western missionaries to devolve authority to the African church leaders, while at the same time placing a considerable emphasis on the African clergy to submit to the missionaries. In protest against this subordination, some African church leaders opted to establish their churches free from the control of the Western missionaries.⁴⁰⁶

Though it is evident that the Baptist missionaries in Malawi contributed to the schisms in one way or the other, the argument in this study is that the secessions in BACOMA should not be attributed to the failure of the Southern Baptist missionaries to “devolve authority to the Malawians.”⁴⁰⁷ Rather, the schisms and conflicts occurred within BACOMA, a church that was led by the Malawians, due to what Oosthuizen calls the “ecclesiastical disputes.”⁴⁰⁸ These factors may be divided into two groups; the major factors and the supporting or the minor

⁴⁰⁵ The subject of schisms from the mainline churches has been extensively covered in numerous books and articles of which the following are only a few. Barrett, D.B. 1968. *Schisms and Renewal in Africa: an Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Movements*. Nairobi. OUP. Daneel, I.M. 1987. *Quest for Belonging*. Gweru: Mambo Press; Hastings, A. 1971. *Mission and Ministry*. London: SPK; Hastings, A. 1994. *The Church in Africa 1450-1950*. Oxford: OUP; Mackay, D.J. Simon Kimbangu and the BMS tradition. *Journal of Religion in Africa*. XVII, 2, 1987; McCracken, J. 2000. *Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875-1940: the Impact of Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province*. Blantyre: CLAIM; Oosthuizen, G.C. 1968. *Post-Christianity in Africa: A theological and anthropological study*. London: SPK, Parrat, J. 1978. Y.Z. Mwasi and the origin of the Blackman's Church. *Journal of African Religion*, IX, 3 and Sundkler, B.G.M. 1961. *Bantu Prophets of South Africa*. London. OUP.

⁴⁰⁶ The Livingstonia Mission in the northern Malawi, established by the Free Church of Scotland (Presbyterians), took a long period of time before ordaining a person into the ministry. For instance, Yesaya Zelenji Mwasi completed his theological training in 1902. He was licensed to preach in 1906. It was not until in May 1914, twelve years after completing his theological training, that he was ordained. In 1915, he was accused of “failing to subordinate himself to Dr William Turner [the Moderator] as his position as an assistant minister required, in accordance with the minutes of the Presbytery specifying the relationship to obtain between the European and Natives Licentiates and Factors.” Mwasi was suspended for a short while. Before the suspension was lifted, the missionaries emphasised that Mwasi could resume work only “on the distinct understanding he will obey the minister in charge as to how he is to carry out his work, and where he is to work, and whatsoever other directions he may receive...” Mwasi and other reputable ministers in the Livingstonia Mission such as Yaphet Mkandawire and Charles Chidongo Chinula seceded from the Livingstonia some years later. Livingstonia Presbytery Minutes for 12 February 1915. Quoted in Parrat, J. 1978. Y.Z. Mwasi and the origin of the Blackman's Church. *Journal of African Religion*, IX, 3. P. 195.

⁴⁰⁷ My point of view is that from the beginning, BACOMA was not led by the BMIM, but by the Malawian Baptists. In this way, the BMIM should not be blamed for failing to devolve authority. But it is proper to argue that the BMIM's management style sowed the seeds of individualism which later developed into secessions.

⁴⁰⁸ Oosthuizen, G.C. 1968. *Post-Christianity in Africa: A theological and anthropological study*. London: SPK. Pp. 209-221.

factors. The major factors are: the interpretation of the Baptist system of the autonomy of the local church in the context of the traditional cultural set up, the segregation policy brought by the Southern Baptist missionaries in Malawi, the spirit of regionalism in the BACOMA leadership and the financial mismanagement. The supporting factors may include poor schooling among Baptist pastors, the influence of the Presbyterian Church government and the type of messages preached in the Baptist churches. Some of these factors need to be highlighted.

9.2 The major factors

9.2.1 The interpretation of the autonomy of the local church in the context of the traditional leadership structure in Malawi

The autonomy of the local church is one of the most treasured aspects of the Baptist church. The congregation, and not the pastor or the elders, is the final authority. BACOMA is no exception.⁴⁰⁹ This study has shown that the Baptist system of church government does not fit well with the Malawian traditional set up where the elders in the communities, usually men, play a crucial role in the decision making process. Generally, the Malawian society is very hierarchical. Being a pastor in Malawi is regarded as an honourable position. Yet in the Baptist system of church government, pastors are not accorded this honour. Some Baptist pastors make every effort to have this recognition. Since Baptist pastors are not transferred from one parish to the other, and since most of them are the founders of the local churches, the way they exercise their powers is similar to the way the “village headmen” or the “village elders” exercise their powers in the communities. Malabwanya stated that...“we are Malawians. We have our culture, so too are the Whites. Their culture and ours are different. We believe that if a person is a leader or a chief, he is not tampered with. We respect him. Even if he is a fool, we wait until he dies.”⁴¹⁰ The autonomy of the local church is interpreted to mean being “independent.”⁴¹¹ Some pastors tend to have absolute control of the church. All the five pastors in this study, including Anthony Bell from the USA, either disregarded the decision of BACOMA, the decision of the local church or the decision of the local Baptist Association. In Malawi, most of the pastors minister in their home areas or in their “adopted” homes where they have been staying for many years. For instance, Malabwanya came to

⁴⁰⁹ In Malawi, the Zambezi Evangelical Church, which uses some of the Baptist traditions such as adult baptism, (but not a Baptist Church) follows a church government that is similar to the Presbyterians.

⁴¹⁰ Pastor Malabwanya, S. Founder of IBCM, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 5 July.

⁴¹¹ The problem is compounded by the translation of the term “the autonomous church.” The term is translated “mpingo woyima paokha,” literally “the congregation that stands alone or an independent congregation or church.”

Blantyre in the 1950s. He became a member of the New Jerusalem Baptist church that was founded and led by his father-in-law. Malabwanya succeeded his father-in-law and led the same church for eighteen years. Kachasu Gama was born, he grew up, he was educated, he founded and he led a church in Zomba. He was the leader of the Zomba Baptist church from 1979 up to 1992. Chilokoteni succeeded Malabwanya as the pastor of the New Jerusalem Baptist church. He led the church for ten years. Rhobo was born and he grew up in the Misesa area. He became a deacon at the Misesa Baptist church and later he became the pastor of the same church. Once such leaders are disciplined, they do not accept the church's verdict. Somehow, it is like disciplining a "village chief." In the end, they opt to stand alone.

9.2.2 The BMIM management style

Going on further, the results of this study have shown that the establishment of the BMIM as a body for the American missionaries and BACOMA for the Malawians partly contributed to the schisms in general, and Malabwanya's secession from BACOMA in particular. The argument is that the BMIM management style created tensions and bitterness within BACOMA. The BMIM facilitated the creation of a separate structure for a special organisation for the Malawian Baptists. This became the root cause of the dissensions that developed afterwards.⁴¹² By opting for segregation, the American Baptists may have developed a culture of individualism which later created problems. The SBC was the only missionary body in Malawi that had a missionary organisation that excluded the nationals. This was in contrast to the Scottish Presbyterians, the Roman Catholic missionaries, the Anglicans and the Seventh Day Adventists. These denominations did not establish a "special church" for the Malawians. In this way, from the beginning, there seemed to be a lack of trust between the BMIM and BACOMA. At present, all the Southern Baptist Convention missionaries that work in Malawi do not come through BACOMA, but through the BMIM. The BMIM processes the temporary employment permits with the Malawi government. BACOMA is not involved. Yet the missionaries "come to Malawi to work with BACOMA."⁴¹³ Apart from this, BACOMA cannot enter into a partnership with any Baptist Convention in the USA that is a member of the SCB without the consent or involvement of the BMIM. This is so because the BMIM is regarded as the "official" representative of the SBC in Malawi. According to Akim Chirwa, when BACOMA formed a partnership with the

⁴¹² See chapter three on how BACOMA was established

⁴¹³ Pastor Akim Chirwa, former General Secretary of BACOMA, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Lilongwe, 18 July.

Oklahoma General Baptist Convention in 2000 (see chapter seven of this thesis) the Baptist missionaries were fully involved as the “facilitators.”⁴¹⁴ Chirwa went on to state that the SBC headquarters in Richmond, Virginia, listens to the voice of the BMIM more than to the voice of BACOMA. Even if BACOMA had a pertinent issue to put across, such a concern is rarely honoured by the SBC.⁴¹⁵ Therefore, on the one hand BACOMA appears more as a semi-autonomous organisation, a “baby” of the BMIM. On the other hand, BACOMA appears to be independent, but powerless.

Apart from the preceding point, the results of this study have further shown that the Baptist missionaries in Malawi participate very little in the BACOMA activities these days. According to Nkhata and Kapalamula, some missionaries do not attend any association meetings. Only one or two may attend the annual general meeting of BACOMA. The missionaries also stopped constructing churches in 1988. But they are involved in the running of the decentralised Bible schools which is part of their missionary work.⁴¹⁶ Pastor Kapalamula argued that “if the missionaries are no longer building church auditoriums, they should also stop training people to become pastors because it does not help to have members of the church praying under a tree.”⁴¹⁷ During the focus group discussions women also said that they did not know what the missionaries were doing these days.⁴¹⁸

9.3 The supporting factors

9.3.1 The impact of poor schooling

The study has also revealed that poor schooling among pastors is another problem in BACOMA. As a matter of comparison, the Presbyterian and the Roman Catholic

⁴¹⁴ Ibid. My description of this partnership is that it was between BACOMA and the Oklahoma General Baptist Convention “through” the BMIM.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid. This could be an explanation why the SBC refused to transfer Bill Wester from Zomba to another country as demanded by the BACOMA executive committee when BACOMA accused Wester of ill treating Malawians and having a colonial mentality. Instead, Wester was transferred from Zomba in southern Malawi to Salima in central Malawi. Among other things, Wester was accused of giving jute sacks to the Malawian women to sew as part of the home craft lessons. See chapter six of this thesis. In 1969, Gene Albright was perceived by the BMIM to be too close to Malawians. He was subsequently transferred to Zambia. When some Malawian pastors tried to reason with the SBC officials not to transfer Albright, the SBC did not listen to the concerns of Malawians. See chapter three of this thesis and Minutes of BMCA-Malawi, Second session, 5-7 August 1969. P. 4. BTSM archives. See also NyaGondwe-Banda, R. 2005. *Women of Bible and Culture: Baptist Convention Women in Southern Malawi*. Zomba: Kachere.

⁴¹⁶ Pastor B. Kapalamula Banda. Former President of BACOMA. 2008. Interviewed by the author, Lilongwe, 24 January.

⁴¹⁷ Pastor B. Kapalamula Banda. Former President of BACOMA. 2008. Interviewed by the author, Lilongwe, 24 January.

⁴¹⁸ Zomba Baptist women, 2008, focus group discussions. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 9 December.

missionaries thoroughly trained Malawians in various disciplines such as administration, medicine, accounting and technical skills as a way of preparing them to lead the church in future. For instance, at the Overtoun Institution which was established by the Livingstonia mission of the Free Church of Scotland (the Presbyterians) in northern Malawi in 1894, theology students were able to assess critically the development of Greek philosophy that led to the recognition of Psychology as a separate science. Other courses that the institution offered included English language and literature, Psychology, History, Logic, Ethics, Mathematics, Sociology and basics of Greek and Latin. The institution also taught medicine, brick laying and carpentry and joinery.⁴¹⁹ But this was not the case with the BMIM. As Rendell Day has pointed out, the SBC work in Malawi was begun with the goal of not providing any subsidies to churches and to “create as few institutions as possible.”⁴²⁰ (Emphasis added). For instance, the Department of Lands and Evaluation in Lilongwe allocated thirty-two hectares of land to the BMIM for the construction of a state of the art Baptist Theological Seminary in 1988. A year later, the missionaries withdrew their developmental plans.⁴²¹ Most of the early pastors did not even finish primary education. The four Malawian pastors in this study did not have a post-primary certificate. After the expiry of Kaiya’s contract as general secretary of BACOMA in 2006, it took one year before the BACOMA executive committee identified a suitable candidate for the post. During the 2006 BACOMA annual general meeting, Pastor Kaiya reported that the new general secretary had not yet been identified. The new general secretary, who replaced Kaiya, was employed towards the end of 2007. This demonstrates that BACOMA leaders seemed to be ill-equipped theologically and administratively to take the challenge of running BACOMA and a few institutions that the missionaries established such as the Media Centre, the Baptist Publications and the Baptist Farm. One of the reasons why some of these institutions are crumbling is due to lack of managerial skills.⁴²²

⁴¹⁹ McCracken, J. 2000. *Politics and Christianity in Malawi: 1875-1940. The Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province*. Blantyre: CLAIM. P. 186. In Malawi, the most sought-after secondary schools such as Chaminade, the Marist (formerly called the Zomba Catholic Secondary School), Livingstonia, Mary Mount, St Michaels Girls just to mention a few, are run by the Presbyterians, the Roman Catholics and the Anglicans. BACOMA has none.

⁴²⁰ Cauthen, B.J. and Means, F.K. 1981. *Advance to Bold Mission Thrust: A History of Southern Baptist Missions*. Richmond: Foreign Mission Board. P. 163-165.

⁴²¹ Ernest A. Sibley to R.D Medland, Lilongwe, 7 March 1989. BTSM archives. But the project of constructing the seminary was complex as I will partially explain later in this chapter.

⁴²² The Baptist Farm, the Baptist Publication house and the Baptist Media Centre are not as active as they used to be.

9.3.2 The type of messages preached in the Baptist churches

Though this study was not about homiletics, another contributing factor why some pastors in BACOMA opt to stand alone can be attributed to the type of messages preached in the Baptist churches. As an evangelical denomination, the Baptist church puts much emphasis on an “individual” receiving Christ as their “personal” saviour. A “person” must have the right standing with Christ.⁴²³ Such messages are not bad per se, but in the long run, the individual becomes more important at the expense of the community. Such messages enhance the spirit of individualism. In Malawi, very rarely does one hear a Baptist pastor preaching on the theme of the social role of Christians in the society. This emphasis on an “individual” does not apply only to BACOMA. In South Africa, for example, the Baptist Union of South Africa distanced itself from “A Message to the People of South Africa”⁴²⁴ in 1968. The BUSA felt “*personal* salvation was confused with national salvation.”⁴²⁵ (Emphasis added). No wonder the BUSA voted to relinquish its membership in the SACC in 1969 and retained only its observer status. In 1976, the BUSA withdrew its observer status and ceased to be a member of the SACC.⁴²⁶ In this way, one can argue that the emphasis on an individual or “personal salvation” made the BUSA in one way or the other, withdraw from the ecumenical body.

9.3.3 The influence of the Presbyterian Church government

Another point that needs to be noted is that the Presbyterian system of church government, where the elders run the church, is very popular in Malawi. But this is not the case with the Baptist system of church government where democracy is held in high esteem. Some Baptist pastors try to exercise power like the Presbyterian “elders.” Some pastors even run their churches like the Presbyterians.⁴²⁷ This sometimes creates tension between the pastor and the members who would like to maintain the congregational form of church government.

⁴²³ I am writing this from personal observation as a Baptist member. This study did not investigate sermons preached in the Baptist churches.

⁴²⁴ In June 1968, the South African Council of Churches issued “A Message to the People of South Africa.” It was a challenge to the apartheid government. The document acknowledged that racism was common in the church. “But, even in the life of the Church there is conformity to the practices of racial separation; and the measure of this conformity is the measure of the Church's deviation from the purpose of Christ...Christians betray their calling if they give their highest loyalty, which is due to Christ, to one group or tradition, especially where that group is demanding self-expression at the expense of other groups.” <http://www.sacc.org.za/about/celebrate16.html> accessed on 14 April 2009.

⁴²⁵ Mogashoa, H. M. 1998. Institutionalised segregation: an overview of the Black Baptist Clergy's seclusion from Mainstream Power Structures 1859-1988. *Studia Historicae Ecclesisticae* XXIV. p.51.

⁴²⁶ Kretzschmar, L. 1992. The Privatisation of the Christian faith Among South African Baptists: With particular Reference to its nature, Extent, Causes and Consequences. PhD. thesis. Cape Town: University of Cape Town. P. 129.

⁴²⁷ Personal observation.

9.4 Other crucial issues concerning the general administration of BACOMA

This study has further revealed that many interviewees including the former general secretary of BACOMA, Fletcher Kaiya, were of the opinion that the BACOMA secretariat should have more powers over the local churches.⁴²⁸ Others suggested that the secretariat should act as a synod. “The secretariat should be able to transfer pastors, provide tangible support to the local churches, and if possible, the salary should come from the central office.”⁴²⁹ In 2007, following some squabbles that were experienced at the Nsomba Baptist church in Blantyre, the general secretary, with a few individuals, expelled the Nsomba Baptist church from BACOMA. But according to the BACOMA constitution, the powers for the termination of membership of any church, or a member of BACOMA, are vested in the annual general meeting of BACOMA.

If the Convention votes in the general meeting by two-thirds majority of its member churches present to suspend her membership, such church shall be considered out of fellowship with the Convention until such time her position is rectified.⁴³⁰

By expelling the Nsomba Baptist church from the Convention the BACOMA secretariat is gradually moving towards a centralised-type of church government. The paradox is that some members within BACOMA would like to see the secretariat assume more powers over the local churches. Yet the same members do not like pastors who exercise centralised administration.

Furthermore, the findings of this study have revealed that most respondents do not know the activities of the BACOMA secretariat.⁴³¹ Sarah White⁴³² expressed similar views in 1997. In her letter to Hany Longwe, she said:

⁴²⁸ Pastor Fletcher Kaiya, former general secretary of BACOMA, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 2 July.

⁴²⁹ Eliya Banda, former secretary of Blantyre Association, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Blantyre, 29 June. All the four pastors under this study indicated that they received very low wages. Rhobo, who first joined the Samaritan Baptist Church before joining the Fundamental Baptist Church, said that Bill Ashbury, the Fundamental Baptist Church missionary in Malawi, said that he was going to support Rhobo and his church. Rhobo then withdrew his membership from the Samaritan Baptist Church and joined the Fundamental Baptist Church of Malawi.

⁴³⁰ BACOMA Constitution, 4.3 (B) 2.

⁴³¹ Pastor W.A.C. Chisi. Former BACOMA president. 2008; Pastor B. Kapalamula Banda. Former President of BACOMA. 2008; Banda, former secretary of Blantyre Association, 2008; Baird Mkorongo, 2008 and Zomba Baptist women, focus group discussions, 2008. Interviewed by the author, Zomba, 9 December.

⁴³² Dr Sarah White, originally from the United Kingdom, was the treasurer of the Zomba Baptist church. She was a lecturer in Statistics at the University of Malawi, Chancellor College. Longwe was a member of the

I have been living and working in Malawi since September 1994 during which time I have been a member of the English speaking congregation at Zomba Baptist Church. Yet I know little about the Convention. If it will be an effective organisation then more consideration will need to be given to what and how it communicates with the churches and their members...⁴³³

This shows that there is insufficient transfer of information between the secretariat and the local churches. This could be one of the contributing factors of churches not participating towards the Co-operative Programme.⁴³⁴ Another reason why most churches do not support the BACOMA secretariat is that a good number of pastors in BACOMA belong either to the Jimmy Hodges Ministries or the Gospel Link.⁴³⁵ They are paid monthly and quarterly respectively by these organisations. Some pastors have private sponsors. For this reason, some pastors give less allegiance to BACOMA since they are not supported by the secretariat.⁴³⁶

9.5 Way forward

9.5.1 The BMIM and BACOMA relationship

The results of this study have shown that the relationship between BACOMA and the BMIM is not cordial. In order to improve the BMIM-BACOMA partnership, there should be a well defined work relationship between the two sister organisations. In the past, the BMIM and BACOMA at least worked together even though there were some tensions. For instance, the BMIM and BACOMA worked together in the Church Development Committee.⁴³⁷ The committee was responsible for the rural church aid such as constructing church buildings. All the funds were provided by the Foreign Mission Board of the SBC. But the SBC changed its policy in 1988. All programmes were discontinued. For instance, when the missionaries handed over the Baptist Publications to BACOMA, the missionaries sold all the high tech

BACOMA executive committee. Longwe wrote letters to certain individuals and churches to support the BACOMA secretariat.

⁴³³ Sarah White to Hany Longwe, 7 January 1997. BTSM archives.

⁴³⁴ BACOMA adopted this programme from the Baptists in the USA. According to the programme, the churches are supposed to send a tenth of their income to the secretariat which then funds the various denominational activities such as the seminary, home missions and others. Very few churches participate in the programme.

⁴³⁵ Chilokoteni, Gama and Malabwanya belong to the Gospel Link. Rhobo has an American friend who supports him.

⁴³⁶ This is from personal observation. Some of the pastors say "what do we get from BACOMA?" Pastor Chilokoteni instructed the members of his church at the New Jerusalem Baptist not to support the BACOMA secretariat (see chapter 7 of this thesis).

⁴³⁷ The committee consisted of two representatives from BACOMA and two from the BMIM.

computers and any other vital equipment that were used in publishing books.⁴³⁸ At present the SBC does not provide money to sustain institutional ministries and projects. The SBC has no operational budget for the mission field except for personal support of a missionary in the field.⁴³⁹ While in the past a Baptist missionary was mandated to be a member of a local church, today joining a local church in the mission field is left to the missionary to decide, not as an imposition from the sending mission agency. In this case, the SBC is under no obligation to force its missionaries to join any local church as it used to do in the past. The involvement of a missionary in the activities of any local church is also left to the missionary's convictions.⁴⁴⁰ At present the BMIM is running the decentralised⁴⁴¹ Bible schools without the involvement of the BACOMA secretariat. The BMIM works with some BACOMA pastors as individuals and not under the BACOMA secretariat. These pastors teach in the Bible schools. The members that are trained in these schools are those who do not have post primary education. Yet BACOMA tries as much as possible for its pastors to have at least a certificate or a diploma in theology. It seems there is a conflict of interest, vision and policy between the two sister organisations.

9.5.2 Overcoming regionalism and individualism

In spite of the points raised in the above section about the BMIM-BACOMA relationship, it could not be appropriate to suggest that the BMIM alone is to blame for the problems that BACOMA faces. It could not be a fair assessment to conclude that the current problems of BACOMA are as a result of the "bad seeds that the missionaries sowed" as some members of BACOMA claim.⁴⁴² The missionaries might have made some errors, but they did their part. A lot needs to be done within BACOMA as Sarah White had indicated in the letter quoted above. As it has been pointed out in the chapter eight of this thesis, a good number of pastors construct church buildings on their plots. These congregations are run like personal estates. Some of them do not have bank accounts. This demonstrates the spirit of individualism.

⁴³⁸ Personal reminiscences.

⁴³⁹ One of the SBC missionaries living in Lilongwe. 2008. Interviewed by the author, 7 December. He opted to remain anonymous. He was the only SBC missionary that accepted to be interviewed, but not tape recorded. He made it a point that the information should be used solely for academic purposes.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ They are called decentralised because the training is done in various places across the country.

⁴⁴² There is a tendency in BACOMA to blame the missionaries for the problems that BACOMA is facing, which I consider to be a sweeping statement.

Going on further, divisions within BACOMA along regional lines should be eliminated. When the missionaries wanted to construct the seminary in Lilongwe in 1988 as it has already been mentioned in the previous section, the leaders in BACOMA did not agree where to construct it. Each wanted the seminary to be constructed in their home region.⁴⁴³ Even though the leaders in BACOMA blamed the missionaries for failing to construct the seminary, it would be fair to argue that the BACOMA leadership also contributed to the collapse of the project. The BACOMA leaders should bury their differences, they should get rid of the spirit of individualism and they should work as members of one family.

9.5.3 The financial management, theological education and possible solutions

Of the four Malawian pastors in this study, three mismanaged finances. BACOMA should embark on training programmes for its pastors in administration, financial management and stewardship.⁴⁴⁴ The retired pastors in BACOMA do not have any source of help. At present there is no pension scheme for BACOMA pastors. If possible, BACOMA should find mechanisms of setting up the pension scheme or a benevolent fund for its pastors. Again, of the five pastors studied, three were involved in a brawl.⁴⁴⁵ BACOMA should teach its members to keep good morals. It is disgraceful for Christians to fight in the church, especially when a pastor is involved in the actual fighting. Yet the Baptists claim to be the “people of the Bible,” meaning that the Bible is their guide in their daily life.

Education is the key to development. BACOMA should try as much as possible to improve the education standards of its pastors. Even though the ministry is a calling, a pastor who is well versed with current issues is in a better position to minister to a cross spectrum of the people. Kachasu Gama could not preach during the English service because his English was not good enough. There should be a common ground between the BACOMA executive committee which prefers to phase out the Bible Schools and the Board of the Seminary which runs the schools and which insists that the Bible Schools should continue.

⁴⁴³ Pastor B. Kapalamula Banda. Former President of BACOMA. 2008. Interviewed by the author, Lilongwe, 24 January.

⁴⁴⁴ Some churches do not have bank accounts. Money is kept in the pastor's house. I was a member of Soche Baptist Church in Blantyre. In 1996 the pastor told the church that keeping money in the bank was not biblical because the Bible says “bring the tithes into the store house” meaning the church. When I left Mwanza in Southern Malawi in 2004, Mwanza Baptist Church did not have a bank account. My current church in the city of Lilongwe does not have a bank account. All the money is kept in the pastor's house. Financial reports are made once or twice a year. It is possible to find some more churches.

⁴⁴⁵ Fighting also took place at the Area 23 Baptist church, the Bethany Baptist church and the Falls Baptist church in Lilongwe within the past five years.

Finally, the BACOMA secretariat should refrain from exercising more powers over its pastors and the local churches. The pastors too should not have absolute power over the local churches. The principle of the autonomy of the local church should not be forfeited. If BACOMA is to remain a congregational church, members of the local church should be involved in the running of the church. The Baptist Convention of Zambia attempted to exercise more powers over the local churches. The result was a split. BACOMA should avoid centralised form of church government as much as possible.

Photo 6: Zomba Baptist focus group discussion, 9 December 2008⁴⁴⁶



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