

**“Roots and Fruits”:**       **Reflections by Vernon Stone, Malawi 1949-56, Zambia 1956-67**

**Introduction:**

In his communication Jim Wilkie writes about "the country where you served as a Scot". I am not a Scot. I came to Britain as a refugee from Nazi Germany. In the British Army I was converted and heard the call to Christ's ministry. I applied to the Church of Scotland, who sent me a form to fill in. It included the question: are you prepared to serve at home or overseas? That question eventually sent me overseas.

**Motivation:**

I felt that in Scotland there were plenty of people to preach the Gospel and to keep going a relatively well-off country. There was a far greater need overseas both spiritually and materially, which people like myself might help to alleviate.

**The situation:**

The period of my service covers the time when both Malawi and Zambia changed from being British possession to becoming independent republics. That was our background.

I came to Malawi at the tail-end of the period of the threefold advance: Church, school and hospital. I came to a Mission Station (a contradiction in terms?) where all three were still in evidence, though in unequal proportions. My position at the Mission Station (head of station after just one year!) confirmed my expectations as per above paragraph: not only was I preaching the Gospel constantly, I was also using all my previous education and training to keep a whole enterprise going, administering affairs, keeping accounts, even sometimes, God help them and me, supervising buildings. I was fully stretched and happy.

The policy pursued by the Foreign Mission Committee at that time was that of integrating the work of the Mission in the indigenous Church. When I came to Malawi, we missionaries met in, and were ruled (under FMC) by the Mission Council. All missionaries were members of it, and no one else. While I was there, it was decided to invite the African Church to send representatives to it as observers. I want to put in a good word for the Mission Council. Not only were we all equal in it, we were also united by a common purpose and a common outlook. Of course there were often fierce arguments and occasionally personal antagonisms. But I must testify that I have not experienced the same level of Christian fellowship, of common endeavour, anywhere else.

But of course it was an anachronism. It would not survive the process of integration. In Malawi, integration in the Church was easy. There already existed a flourishing, staunchly Presbyterian Church, the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, (C.C.A.P. )in which we ordained missionaries were Ministers of equal standing with our African brethren, no more.

In Zambia things were different, and indeed more difficult. Before my time the group of CCAP congregations in Zambia eloped with the daughter church of the London Missionary Society (largely congregational in polity) to form the Church of Central

Africa in Rhodesia. This church united in turn with the United Missions to the Copper Belt to form the United Church of Central Africa in Rhodesia. (UCCAR) During my time, after protracted negotiations, Union was achieved with the Zambia district of the Methodist Church, and the congregations in Barotseland which had been founded by missionaries from the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society. The United Church of Zambia was constituted on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1965. In a fiery address President Kaunda urged us to further union. He would have liked to round off his slogan 'One Zambia, One Nation' with 'One Church'.

When Integration took place the UCCAR was not a strong church, with only very few African Ministers. Nonetheless integration was finally achieved. It was a sign of the strains and stresses that we had been through that at the first meeting of the integrated Synod the Moderator of the Northern Presbytery, a devout and faithful missionary of many years' standing. was "not invited to return" after furlough.

### **Other Partners in Mission**

It became clear during my time that the Church of Scotland no longer had the resources adequately to sustain the work in these countries. In Malawi after my time the Presbyterian Church in Ireland shared the burden, and in Zambia we worked together with several other partners including the United Church of Canada.

As far as the two other arms of missionary endeavour were concerned, I am not competent to speak of the medical side. In education when I came. the Missions, under some government supervision, were running practically the whole national system of schools, with the aid of 100% government grants. When government decided that the Missions had to meet the first 5/- per month of teachers' pay, this proved an impossible burden, and Mission input into education practically ceased. - What does it signify that the government of Zambia has this year, 2008, handed over control of the budding secondary school at Mwandu to the Church? (The Church is supported financially by Christians in the USA).

### **A brief word about what I did:**

I was a district missionary in Malawi and Zambia 1949-60, and I was Principal of the Ministers' Training College of the United Church of Zambia 1960-66 (soon after to be renamed Theological College). I actually returned to Zambia 1967-70 under the auspices of the Bible Society, to head up a team that produced a new translation of the New Testament into ciBemba.

### **To speak now of the inner history of those years:**

In a sense the watchword of the Church of Scotland's Foreign Mission Committee, "integration" expressed my own hopes and expectations. I was thrilled when a teacher in the Station school at Loudon was converted in a way similar to my own, and we were able to share this our Christian experience. (He went on to become a leading Minister in the CCAP) I tried to get closer to my African friends than my predecessors did, but I was easily surpassed by my successors

We missionaries were regarded as people in authority, and to a large extent that was the position until integration was implemented. It militated against full fellowship. Another difficulty was the disparity in wealth. How could we talk of the parity of Ministry when we had ten times as much income as they? Added to this, in Zambia

anyway, must be the racial tension engendered by the Federation and all the influences coming up from the apartheid South. In spite of it all, the work of evangelism went ahead, we worked together fruitfully, and the Church flourished.

Let one incident illustrate this: I had taken my theological students on an evangelistic campaign in the mining town of Bancroft/Cililabombwe. At a public meeting a man asked: "what does it mean, the lion shall lie down with the lamb?" I was attempting a learned answer, when I was interrupted by a man from the audience who said: "I am a Tonga. My friend here is a Ngoni. The Ngoni used to chase us until we had to flee into Lake Malawi to escape them. Then came the Gospel. Now he is my friend. The lion shall lie down with the lamb" With witnesses like this it is no wonder that the Church grew by leaps and bounds.

After I left the theological college, my Zambian colleague became Principal. When I returned to Zambia under the Bible Society, he asked me to become Treasurer of the College. I felt that there was something symbolic in this: Technical matters such as keeping accounts were (?are) perhaps still better left to Westerners, but the work of evangelism and Christian formation goes forward under African leadership.

I have a feeling that God wanted me to go further in understanding the African world-view and to have closer friendships with my African colleagues than I did. Apart from that, all my feelings about my time overseas are positive. If it were not for family reasons. I would gladly have carried on.

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