

Baptist Convention Women as Agents of Change and Accommodation

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1. Introduction

History has shown what women in many Christian churches have been perceived to take support roles only, while leaving leadership roles to their male counterparts¹. Many women on both the local and the global scene have written against such malpractice's and sought ways of how church women can be liberated as they serve in church and society². In the history of the American Protestant missions, for example, women were only involved in supporting the ministry of men. Since they could not be contented with such status, they decided to form their own societies to have a role in the church and society³. The purpose of this paper is not to show how women are oppressed or why, for this has been well demonstrated through the writings of many⁴, but the paper seeks to show, through the history of Baptist Convention⁵ women, whether such a claim is totally, partially or not true at all, as regards the historic experiences of Baptist Convention women.

In this paper I argue that Baptist Convention women present an alternative view of the status of women in church and of their role in society. Since their early beginning in 1960, Baptist Convention women have enjoyed relative freedoms in roles they have assumed in church and society because of their ability to accommodate themselves to the existing Christian and traditional cultures, though not at the expense of being agents of social, religious and political change in their communities⁶. This is possible because of Baptist church polity and doctrine. Baptist polity does not force congregations to conform to uniformity apart from doctrinal issues. Their polity emphasizes more equal partnership than hierarchies.

2. Materials and Method

¹ Isabel Phiri, *Women Presbyterianism and Patriarchy, Religious Express of Chewa Women in Central Malawi*, Blantyre: CLAIM, 1997, p. 72

² Ibid., also see Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa, Africa Women and Patriarchy*, Orbis: Maryknoll, 1995, p. 9

³ Pierce Beaver, *American Protestant Women in World Mission: A history of First Feminist Movement in North America*, Grand Rapids, 1980.

⁴ Isabel Phiri, *Women Presbyterianism and Patriarchy*.

⁵ The Baptist Convention of Malawi is the largest of about 20 Baptist denomination in Malawi. Founded in 1960 through Southern Baptist missionary work from the USA, it has now about 600 congregations with 60 000 members, or 80 000. Statistics are very hazy.

⁶ Accommodation refers to the ability to adapt to the prevailing African traditional culture and or Christian cultures. Change refers to positive and negative influences these women have brought in their communities.

This paper has resulted from my ongoing research I started in August 1999 on the history of women in the Baptist Convention and was done in and around Blantyre, Chikwawa, Zomba, Balaka, Lilongwe, Salima, Mzuzu, Mzimba and Rumphi. The paper largely relies in primary sources through oral individuals and group interviews I conducted by myself and by research assistants. I have also utilized notes of fellow researchers in the postgraduate program like those of Hany Longwe and Rendell Day, whose research touches my area of study. For theoretical framework and context, I have used the works of Isabel Phiri⁷ and of Helen van Koevering⁸. It is from these sources that I singled out some of the issues reflected on in this paper, although I approach them from different perspective, that of an Evangelical and a Baptist⁹. I have also utilized anthropological,¹⁰ historical¹¹ and missionary works.¹² Some of the issues I discuss in this paper are unique to these women and have not been discussed elsewhere.

Research Findings discussion

3. Early Beginnings of Baptist Convention Women 1960 to 1966¹³

The challenge of modern historiography is to write history from the perspective of the ordinary man rather than the elite. However, this does not imply that the elite are always to be seen at the bottom of history because in some instances, they indeed are the beginners of histories with a case with the history of the Baptist Convention women in Malawi. Their history begins with a group of elites in Blantyre at Cliccord Hose in Limbe from 1960.¹⁴ From this industrial city, women's work has spread to other surrounding districts and regions of Malawi as well as across the Mozambique border.¹⁵

a) Core group women in Blantyre

Baptist Convention women are part of a missionary Church that came to Malawi largely under the influence of the Southern Baptist missionaries from America as an extension of Baptist Mission work in Zimbabwe.¹⁶ As such the pioneering core group of Baptist Convention women in Blantyre was firstly

⁷ Isabel Phiri, *Women Presbyterianism and Patriarchy*, pp. 11-13

⁸ Helen van Koevering, *Dancing their Dreams: The Lakeshore Nyanja Women of the Anglican Diocese of Niassa*. MPhil, University of Birstol, 1999.

⁹ Evangelicals can broadly be defined as those that are committed to a personal new faith in Christ and rely on the Bible as a basis for faith and Christian living and put high value on missions and evangelism.

¹⁰ Such as Matthews Schoffeleers, *Religion and Dramatisation of Life: Spirit Beliefs and Rituals in Southern and Central Malawi*, Blantyre: CLAIM, 1997, pp. 89-90

¹¹ Like Kenneth Ross, *Christianity in Malawi*, Blantyre: CLAIM, 1999 p. 109.

¹² Like Klaus Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions. From Hudson Taylor to Present Day Africa*, Oxford et al.: Regnum, 1994.

¹³ This is a significant break because it marks the beginning of major local influence in the history of this church

¹⁴ Interview J.M. Ng'oma, Soche Baptist Church 25/5/99. The core group was there before the women's training centre built in 1960.

¹⁵ Rev Malikebu took Baptist work to Mozambique. Interview Mrs. Malikebu, Zomba Baptist Church, 28/11/99

¹⁶ Interview Marget Nyika, Blantyre Baptist Church, 26/5/99. Rendell Day, "From Gowa Undustrial Mission to Landmark Baptist". *One Hundred years of Baptist Chruches in Malawi 1894-1994*," PhD Module, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Malawi, 1994.

composed of all the three Southern Baptist missionary women who were in Malawi in 1960. These were Mrs.. Blanche Wester, Mrs.. Jean Albright, and Mrs.. Beverly Kingsley. They came to Blantyre following their husbands, who were in a missionary assignment to Malawi. These women together with their husbands had a vision to start Baptist work in Malawi, but they had to begin somewhere and they chose to begin in Blantyre. They decide to begin an English speaking church where non Chichewa speaking people would come for services. Indeed in the early 1960s, it is perceived to have been the only church in the city of Blantyre that held an English Service.¹⁷ This may not be true but rather it was an English speaking church that was more accommodating to members of other churches as other churches were more strict on denominational affiliations. Members that were not Baptist were given the opportunity to become associate members.¹⁸

Baptist Convention women's work grew at Cliccord House as women were gathered together. These were already Baptist from elsewhere or were not Baptist but sought an English speaking church. The latter had belonged to another church group in their homeland but either because their home church was absent in this city or did not hold an English service, they joined this Baptist group.¹⁹ As such this first core group of women was largely composed of expatriates.²⁰ These had come to Blantyre for employment. Mrs. Bright for example, was the Mayor of Blantyre then, and was already a Baptist. Other women were on a diplomatic mission to Malawi and found Blantyre Baptist relevant to their social class.²¹ Women that came to the Baptist Church came as either a family or individuals. Mrs. Effie Cameron came as an individual. She was a divorcee, the former wife of a British working in the city of Blantyre.²²

Although the first group of women in Blantyre in 1960 was largely of the community,²³ some were local Malawians of high socio-economic class. One of these was Mrs. Aleke Banda.²⁴ In fact she got married to Aleke in this Blantyre Baptist Church.²⁵

The other important component of this core group were Malawi migrant returnees. These were women, mostly South Africa, who were married to Malawian men who had gone abroad of work or other reasons. The first such woman that became part of this group in 1962 was Mary Galatiya. She became part of the group when her husband, by coincidence or God's appointment, met Wester in Blantyre while selling *kachewere* (Irish potatoes). Since then, Mary and her husband moved from their home district in Neno in Mwanza to Blantyre City. This time Mary's husband was not to be selling *kachewere*, but to an assistant pastor to Kingsley. By this Mary Galatiya became an assistant pastor's wife full time. She is South African and fluent in English, but by 1962, she had been living in Mwanza for two years and was also fluent in Chichewa. With this advantage, she became a useful companion to Mrs. Kingsley.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ This status was probably unlikely to be granted in other churches.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Mr J.M. Ng'oma, Soche Baptist Church, 25/5/99. Rev Stephen Galatiya and Mrs. Mary Galatiya, Likudzi Estate Chipiriro Baptist Church, 15/5/2000.

²¹ Ibid

²² Interview, Fanny Kwelakwela (nee Malabwanya) Bnagwe Baptist Church, 30/4/2000

²³ Interview Rev Stephen Galatiya and Mary Mary Galatiya, Likudzi Estate, Chipiriro Baptist Church, 15/05/2000

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Interview Margaret Nyika, Blantyre Baptist Church, 26/05/1999

She used to help Mrs. Kingsley in translation work as she worked with local women.²⁶ Mary Galatiya became an important agent of change in this congregation. She attracted to membership fellow South African women married to local Malawian men. These were the likes of Mrs. Nyirenda and Mrs. Beauty Maseko.²⁷ It is a possibility that the common background of these women influenced them in joining Blantyre Baptist Church together.

Women participation was accommodated to the model provided by the missionary women. In the Southern Baptist Mission, the role of the missionary wives was firstly to be good wives to their husbands, secondly, to be good home makers and mothers. Lastly, they were to be supporters of their husband's ministry.²⁸ It is with this vision that they influenced women who came to the church. This meant that women were not exposed to women leadership roles in the church like preaching at a normal Sunday. Such leadership roles were only played by men, the husbands of these missionary women. Women roles were restricted to leading in a song, doing a play or saying a prayer²⁹ and hospitality as supporters of their husbands ministries. Although women's roles were limited, the church met their sociological and spiritual needs. Blantyre Baptist became a place where they could make friends. Most of them were people displaced from their homeland, family and friendship ties. This became their alternative home.

The three missionary women lived in Blantyre from 1960 to 1961. Before they could start their assignment in rural areas, they had to become culturally relevant by learning Chichewa, the official national local language of the day.³⁰ Soon after this, the women were re-allocated to different places where they would support their husband to start Baptist work. As such in 1961 Mrs. Blanche Wester was sent to work in Zomba, the old capita of Malawi, While Mrs. Jean Albright was sent to Lilongwe city, the control centre of the Central Region. Mrs. Kingsley retained her place in Blantyre. She was to be the pastor's wife in Blantyre Baptist Church.³¹

The missionaries were keen at training local leadership in theology since the beginning of Baptist work in Malawi. However there were regulations to be followed for the women to go into training. They were first to be wives. And as supporters of their husband's ministry, they would only go to training if the husband was eligible for Seminary training. Eligibility was defined by the fact that the husband should pass English proficiency test administered at the Seminary, either Zimbabwe Baptist Seminary in Gweru or Zambia Baptist Seminary in Lusaka.³² However the wife also sat for the same English proficiency test. If she passed, she was admitted into the regular class with her husband and other male trainee pastors. In this class she did all the courses that men did except Preaching and Ethics. Church History was optional. Apart from these courses, it was mandatory that she learnt the *wife's course*. The wife's course was comprised of sewing and cooking skills and an overview of the Baptist women's organization (WMU).³³ Those whose husbands could not pass the entry exam, even though they themselves would have, were not able to go to the Seminary.

²⁶ Stephen Galatiya, and Mary Galatiya, Likudzi Estate, Chipiriro Baptist Church, 15/05/2000

²⁷ Interview J.M. Ng'oma, Soche Baptist Church, 25/5/1999

²⁸ Interview Rev Dr. Sam Upton, Southern Baptist Missionary, Lilongwe Baptist Seminar4y, August 1999. He said that this is according to Southern Baptist Mission policy.

²⁹ Programmes of Annual women meetings show that missionary women were only involved in such.

³⁰ Dr Sam Up, Southern Baptist Missionary, Lilongwe Baptist Seminary, August, 1999

³¹ Interview Rev Galatiya, Likudzi Estate, Chipiriro Baptist Church, 15/5/2000.

³² Ibid

³³ WMU means Women's Missionary Union

The nature of the training offered to the local women was accommodated to the policy which guided the missionary wives. They did not have to learn preaching, because their ministry was not to lead but support. They were however to master home management skills which would help them in their support ministries to their husbands. With these skills they could be hospitable and attract others to the Baptist message. Although the reason why they were not offered to do an Ethics course is not clear, it is possible that they thought that the course was not appropriate to women who were intended to be silent in the church as opposed to being argumentative as is characteristic of dealing with Ethical issues. The main aim of learning Ethic as Christians is to defend the Christian message. This symbolizes some form of aggression which is perceived to be appropriate for males only. Although the criteria for Seminary training barred some from theological training, other women got it. One of the women who went for theological training was Mary Galatiya.

In 1963, Mary Galatiya went to Gweru Baptist Seminary in Zimbabwe together with her husband, Stephen Galatiya.³⁴ She passed the entrance exams and was in a regular class with him. This enabled her to do Church History and other courses in a regular class as was appropriate for a woman at that time. Since the training was for three years, she was in this training unto 1965. But although she was the first woman to be sent by the Malawi Baptist Convention into training, Mrs.. Maya was the first trained woman in theology in Malawi. She was already trained in Zambia sent by the Zambian Baptist church. She was a South African and was married to Rev Maya, a Malawian, while in Zambia. During the absence of Mary Galatiya, in Blantyre Baptist Church, Mrs.. Maya was an assistant pastor's wife to Mrs.. Beverly Kingsley.³⁵

In 1965, the missionaries invited Stephen Galatiya to be assistant pastor to Rev Kingsley. Mrs.. Mary Galatiya became as assistant pastor's wife. Although Baptist polity says that a pastor is invited by a local congregation, the missionary style was contrary to the principle at that time. The missionaries were the one who allocated the pastors. The missionaries were also very authoritarian in that all baptisms in the early years were done by a missionary even though Rev Galatiya and Rev. Maya were already trained pastors.

During the years 1963 to 1965, when Mrs.. Mary Glatiya was in training, Blantyre Baptist Church went through a transformation. Non English speaking women began to come to the service. The majority came from the ministry of Mrs.. Effie Cameroon. She used to accommodate needy people in her home in New Lands. Since she was a Baptist, every Sunday she invited them to come with her to church. Mrs.. Beverly Kingsley used to pick these people to church.³⁶ One of such women was Mrs.. Lazarus Malabwanya who was converted to the Baptist faith in this way.³⁷ The three South African women, Mrs.. Nyirenda, Mrs.. Maseko and Mrs.. Maya also attracted other women into the group. And by 1965, when Mary Galatiya came back from theological training, the church had become very mixed culturally and linguistically. There were migrant women, expatriate women, local and high class women but also

³⁴ Interview Mary Galatiya, Likudzi Estate, Chipiriro Baptist Church Women's Conference, Lumbadzi Baptist Church, 6/5/2000.

³⁵ Interview Mary Galatiya, Likudzi Estate, Chiriro Baptist Church, 15/5/2000.

³⁶ Interview Fanny Kwelakwela, Bangwe Baptist Church, 30/4/2000. Fanny was also one of the women at Cameroon's backyard.

³⁷ Ibid., She was at Cameroon's backyard because she was blind and lived on begging in the city of Blantyre. Fanny Kwelakwela, her daughter, also stayed there with her mother to assist her.

women of lower socio-economic status like Mrs.. Lazarus Malabwanya.³⁸ The inflow of the low class women signifies that it was not the intention of the missionaries to restrict the Baptist message to the elite of Blantyre. Their vision was to bring change to all classes of people.

However the mixture of people of different social backgrounds meant that the English language as the medium of instruction in the service was no longer appropriate. Since now there were women in the church who could not understand English. Similarly, Chichewa may have been suitable to the missionary women, but not necessarily to some of the expatriate community. There was need for the church to accommodate itself to this change if they were to be effective in bringing change to all members. In any case, it is possible that some high class women went to this church for prestige, and the inflow of lower class women might have discouraged them in the long run. Such people might have felt it necessary to maintain that high social standing. Through consultation between the local and expatriate leadership, it was mutually decided that the service be divided into Chichewa and English services.³⁹ This happened in 1966, just a year after the return of Mrs.. Mary Galatiya from theological training. The year 1966 marks the beginning of one of the important aspects of Baptist polity, that of democracy. Unlike in the first years when the missionaries made decisions concerning church, decisions, were now largely dependent on a congregation.

Although the split was primarily based on linguistic disparities, it also meant regrouping these women into two district categories; higher social class women (English service) and lower social class women (Chichewa). This also meant that Sunday collections from the English service were much higher than from the Chichewa service because of differences in earning power.

Mrs.. Mary Galatiya was the pastor's wife for the Chichewa service while Beverly Kingsley was pastor's wife for the English Service. In this capacity they worked together in teaching local women about the Baptist message. Their lesson's centered on family values and home management skills, following the model of Mrs.. Beverly Kingsley's teachings. This arrangement worked out only for a year when Mrs. Kingsley was still in Blantyre. In 1966, she was transferred to Lilongwe, and was replaced by a new Missionary woman – Mrs.. Davidson.⁴⁰

During the leadership of Mrs.. Davidson and her husband, the Chichewa Congregation was told to be responsible for their local pastor. This, compounded with the fact that the English Congregation occupied a room upstairs while the Chichewa one occupied a room downstairs, was interpreted by the local Malawians as racism. As a result the Chichewa congregation left the Cliccord building to meet in Newlands in Mary Galatiya's house.⁴¹ Although this seemed to be a bad thing, it was in reality the

³⁸ Interview Rev Stephen Galatiya, Mrs. Mary Galatiya, Likudzi Estate, Chipiriro Baptist Church, 15/5/2000

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid., One Sunday service, Galatiya told his congregation that he felt Davidson was racist in his decision concerning indigenous support for an indigenous pastor. He challenged the congregation that he was going to leave Cliccord building and begin a Church in his house. He preached a sermon on Acts 3:6 where Peter, talking to the lame man at the temple gate called Beautiful, said "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have. I give to you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk". From these verses he challenged the congregation that if they wanted to follow him, they should do so but told them that he would not give them *kaunjika* or money because he did not have any. The following Sunday, which is still referred to as "the big Sunday" by those that were part of this congregation then, the whole congregation came to Galatiya's house. The Cliccord building was conspicuously without the Chichewa congregation.

beginning of local identity and a practice of democratic right every Baptist should have, regarding decisions affecting her church. The added advantage was that from this time, the local women did not accommodate themselves to the Christian culture of the missionary women. They gained momentum to change what was prescribed to them by the missionaries in terms of women's roles in church and society.

Women began to be involved in revolutionary activities. They were not only involved in teaching family values and home management skills as taught by missionary wives, but assumed leadership roles. Mrs. Ng'oma and Mrs. Mary Galatiya were involved in preaching during the normal Sunday services in Mrs. Galatiya's house. Earlier on, in the Clliccord building, preaching was only the domain of men who were usually pastors. This change originates from an external influence Mrs. Galatiya was exposed to while in Zimbabwe at the Seminary. There she and her husband were exposed to liberative ideas on women's roles in church as encouraged by Dr. Lockert, a Southern Baptist missionary.⁴² Because of Dr. Lockert's position, he was seen to be subversive in his theology by his fellow missionaries, who were against this practice of encouraging women in leadership.

While the English service did not spread, the Chichewa congregation at New Lands grew and spread to other areas. Mary Galatiya's home became too small to accommodate the increased numbers of people coming for the church services. As such her husband decided that some walls of the house be demolished to create a hall for the church. In this Baptists demonstrated that they did not only accommodate their message to their context but also their building structures. For the locals New Lands became a place where they started bringing change to the community and therefore they called this church Jerusalem Church. This was a real accommodation of the Acts 1:8 message "You shall be my witnesses from Jerusalem..." This church spread to other areas very fast and it was intended to be such, according to their Acts 1:8 message. In the following year, the members of Jerusalem church started Bangwe church in 1967. In 1968 a third church was started, Soche Baptist Church. This church growth came about because of accommodating the Baptist message to traditionally accepted ways. While the method of extending the Baptist message at Clliccord House was more western in style, for example, calling people for bible study, they adopted more aggressive and traditional ways of extending their messages. They went door to door telling people about their message. In this way they were relevant to their cultural political context when it was unusual for people, both women and men, to knock at people's doors selling party cards or inviting people for a party meeting.

The women also targeted the felt need of the local people. One of such needs was to provide a decent burial to people who were denied such by their churches. Such people could have been rejected because of inconsistent membership in their churches, failure to pay church dues or having unaccepted marriages. Rev. Galatiya would preach at such funerals and the women would sing and pray. In this way, they won others to their Baptist Church. In this, Baptist women showed that they did not resent support roles, but considered them also as valuable in the growth of the church.

⁴² Ibid., Dr. Locket was often referred to as wowukira (subversive) in his teaching and for this reason he was later on transferred from this seminary to teach his fellow missionaries in America. Dr. Locket has served in Nigeria for many years before coming to Zimbabwe.

b) The Core group women at Falls in Lilongwe

Baptist Convention women's work started in Lilongwe with Mrs.. Jean Albright and her husband. Unlike in Blantyre, where women were easily gathered together, the Lilongwe core group was realized slowly. Jean Albright worked in Lilongwe for three years without yielding any Baptist soul. The overriding vision of the missionaries at that time was that Lilongwe should have a bible school where pastors⁴³ who would not make it for the Zambia or Zimbabwe Seminary would go for short courses. The Baptist message in Lilongwe was to be spread in this context. The first Bible School class came to Lilongwe in 1962. The class was all male. No woman was recruited for such a training. However through the biblical film shows this class showed around Kawale (a suburb) in Lilongwe in the evenings, some women such as Mrs.. Makuluni became Baptist.⁴⁴

Mrs.. Jean Albright and Mrs.. Makuluni with her family, started meeting in Kadango's Store for Bible Study. These were joined by Elizabeth Njolomole in 1964, Leroy Albright went into the rural of Ntcheu district. Since the political climate was unfriendly to Europeans then, he usually asked police escort for his meetings. Elizabeth Njolomole's husband became the escort. Mrs.. Elizabeth Njolomele became a Baptist following her husband who was converted at such a meeting. Elizabeth Njolomole Phiri joined the Falls group when her husband got transferred to Lilongwe. It was normal for police officers to be frequently moved from one station to the other during this period, to avoid too much familiarity with the people. Mrs.. Mary Makhaya was also brought to Lilongwe by Leroy Albright because her husband was employed by the Mission to sell bibles and other books.⁴⁵

Through a biblical film show around Ntcheu, Mrs.. Makhaya with her husband became Baptists.⁴⁶ She was converted from Zambezi Evangelical Church. By then she was already an able leader in her church. As such, Mrs.. Mary Makhaya, Mrs.. Njolomole Phiri and others met not only for Sunday services but by 1964, they had already started mid week women's meetings. At these meetings Mrs.. Makhaya would lead the women together with Jean Albright.⁴⁷ Although Mrs.. Makhaya had not gone for theological training then, her former church experience in women's work helping her lead Baptist women. Mrs.. Makhaya is a typical example of how Baptist Convention Women accommodate their past church experience to the Baptist faith. This is done sometimes in positive and negative sense. This is possible because Baptists are not under pressure to conform in the way they do things. This can be mistaken to cause confusion. But this is a well treasured characteristic of the Baptist Convention church that its members do not want to loose. It gives them freedom to serve and practice their faith. In fact, this has become one of the things that attract women and men to the Baptist Church Mrs.. Albright helped Mrs.. Makhaya in leading the women because she was also already familiar with such kind of work while working in Zambia.⁴⁸

⁴³ In the Baptist Convention the term "pastor" is not restricted to the full time minister trained in theology, but equally applies to the village pastor, looking after a small congregation of maybe 50 people, being fully or almost fully self-supporting, and usually having received little theological training.

⁴⁴ Interview Mrs. Mary Galatiya and Rev Stephen Galatiya, Chipiriro Baptist Church 15/5/2000.

⁴⁵ Hany Longwe's research notes, MA in Church History, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Malawi, Chancellor College, 1999. Also, Interview, Elizabeth Njolomole, Mzuzu Baptist Church

⁴⁶ Interview Elizabeth Njolomole, Mzuzu Baptist Church

⁴⁷ Interview Elizabeth Njolomole, Mzuzu Baptist Church

⁴⁸ Albright was working in Zambia before he came to Malawi. Interview Rev Oscar Matupi Zomba Baptist Church, Zomba 15/5/2000

Mrs.. Elizabeth Njolomole went to Zimbabwe Baptist seminary in 1964 and came back after 3 years in 1967.⁴⁹ Mrs.. Elizabeth Njolomole is a typical example of women who were converted to Baptist church but not to its message. She was only converted to the Baptist message while in seminary through the witness of a Baptist pastor there.⁵⁰ Again just as what happened with Mary Galatiya in Blantyre, the missionaries allocated her husband to pastor Soche Baptist Church in Blantyre. In this case, it meant that Elizabeth was to be pastor's wife at Soche Baptist Church in Blantyre. By this time, Rev Galatiya and Mrs.. Galatiya were reconciled with Rev Davidson whom they had not seen for a year. But even though there was such reconciliation. Mrs. Davidson and her husband were not supervising the work in the Blantyre Chichewa congregation. The coming of Elizabeth Njolomole, therefore, was a relief to Mrs. Mary Galatiya who by this time was pastor's wife as Soche Baptist Church as well as at Jerusalem Baptist Church.⁵¹

It was the missionaries' vision that the local pastors who were trained from Zambia and Zimbabwe run the bible school in Lilongwe. The wives of these had nothing to do with the bible school. In any case, while women went with their husbands when going to the Zambia and Zimbabwe Seminary, the wives of pastors that came for bible school in Lilongwe, were left at home. They did not attend the training. Mary Makhaya was the first one to have her husband direct the bible school. She went to Gweru Baptist Seminary in 1965 and because of old age, she and her husband were there only for a year up to 1966. Even though she was not involved in direct bible school work she helped teach church women who earlier met in Kadango's Store and were now meeting in the bible school building as members of Falls Baptist Church. Mrs. Jean Albright was in this church assisting the women but she was also involved in teaching bible to the neighbouring schools. Mrs. Makhaya, therefore, became a useful team mate in women's work in Lilongwe. It is clear the the period of 1966 was also very significant as the Baptist Convention work in Lilongwe marked the beginning of local leadership involvement at the bible school as directectors. Mrs. Mary Makhaya's husband was the first one. This was certainly a pride to her as a wife. In any case, even though she was not involved in the bible school, her involvement in the local church was valuable. Mary Makhaya was not involved in bible school because teaching in the Baptist church at this time was sharply divided on gender. Women taught women only.

c. The core group women at Jali in Zomba

Characteristics of this place, and different from Blantyre and Lilongwe, were group conventions of congregations to the Baptist church. The classic example that marks the first source of Baptist women in the area is Ndalama Zion church. The congregation was dissatisfied with her leadership. They heard of Baptist missionaries in Zomba township and decided to seek after them. Through the mediation of Stephen Galatiya, Kachasu Gama, the leader of Zion Church, and through Wester, the whole Zion Church became Baptist. Mrs. Kachasu Gama became the first Baptist pastor's wife in this area. Little is traced from these women because, the congregation, not much later, left the Baptist Convention to join another denomination.⁵²

⁴⁹ Interview Elizabeth Njolomole, Mzuzu Baptist Church

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Interview Rev Stephen Galatiya, Chipiriro Baptist Church, 15/5/2000

⁵² "Severe" Church because the leader was Mr Severe, but it was a "Church of Christ".

The lasting women's work in this area is traced from the second group conversion that took place in the same year of 1961, at Chayima in Jali. The women belonged to "Severe Church".⁵³ Mrs. Blanche Wester got excited with this development. She complimented her husband's effort by bringing in development work among the women. She taught women sewing and cooking skills. This became a centre of attraction to many women who became Baptist as individuals and many times as families.

Apart from development skills, Mrs. Wester, organized *phwandos* (parties) for the villagers. Many women and men went to attend these *phwandos*. It was a time for the local rural people to eat goat meat, beef rice and even *Chambo* brought by the missionaries. Many women became Baptist through this. These development efforts at Chayima, attracted women from far places as well. Mrs. Esmey Masangano, Mrs. Mercy Chimbaka, Elidah Fayson of Makoliye village in Jali, Mrs. Anganeje Tsegula (Mrs. Mahere), Mrs. Chimenya, Mrs. Chipolopolo and Mrs. Majomboshe of Chayima village; Mrs. Andisambula of Mandawala village, Mrs. Mauluka village came to this Church. Because of distance, these women, usually through their initiative, brought the Baptist Church to their villages through similar activities such as *phando* meetings and Mrs. Wester's development work.

The other mass exodus happened under the influence of a woman. Andisambula became tired of walking to Chayima Baptist Church. In 1964, she decided to bring the Baptist church into her village, Mandawala. Her husband belonged to Smith Church, another branch of Churches of Christ. When she became a Baptist, her husband refused to join her. She talked to some members of Church of Christ and a whole church of Christ congregation in her area became Baptist. They abandoned the Church of Christ building and opted to worship under Andisambula's Mango tree. The women deserved to be a pastor of the church, but Mrs. Wester and her husband put a man in charge of this congregation while Andisambula was left with the responsibility of a deacon and leader of the women. There were in any case no woman pastors in Malawi Baptist Convention Churches at this time.

The issue of group conversions is interesting for it presents the problem of what kind of conversion these women had. According to Baptist polity, conversion to Baptist faith happens when one believes the Christian message⁵⁴ and is baptized by immersion. But in general, conversions can be immersion. 2. Those that did not believe the Christian message and got baptized through chosen to join the Baptist church and become baptized through immersion. 3. Those that already believed in the Christian message in another church but because of other reasons, they come to Baptist faith.⁵⁵ This third category comprises those that were already baptized by immersion, in which case they did not have to be rebaptized. The other group comprises those that did not get baptized nor had a baptism by sprinkling. These need to be baptized by immersion to be full members of the Baptist Church. Conversion stories show that all three categories of conversions were characteristic of the group conversions.

One of the ways Baptist Conversion women's work also grew was through offering social services for example *kaunjika* (second hand clothes). Mrs. Malikebu of Malikebu village used her home as a distribution point of such items. Although this help was given in all the centers, Blantyre, Lilongwe and

⁵³ Disagreement was between Rev Chimenya and Mr Severe. Mr Severe was involved in an extramarital affair with a girl in his church. Rev Chimenya and the whole congregation thought this was an unbecoming behavior and sought after Wester to become Baptists.

⁵⁴ What is required is not just intellectual consent, but personal commitment (fiducia).

⁵⁵ Interview, Dr. Klaus Fiedler, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Malawi, Chancellor College.

Zomba, it made a bigger impact here in Zomba. The reason is because Jali is rural and poorer than the other places.

Although the number of conversions was much more in this area compared to other areas, there was less local leadership development. The region faced a literacy set back. Among women who had become Baptists, including their husbands, none was able to read and write English. The missionaries had searched in vain during the early 1960s to identify a couple to go for theological training. This led to the absence of theologically trained women and men in this district.⁵⁶ As such, Mrs. Wester did most of the Baptist women's activities. She had occasional relief from women leaders in Blantyre and Lilongwe. Mrs. Njolomole Phiri and Mrs. Mary Galatiya from time to time visited Zomba area to teach women.

Group conversions in rural Jali were encouraged by *phwandos* and development work activities brought in by the missionaries. They were free and attractive to them. They provided a source of interaction among villagers. The time women spent in learning how to sew and cook was synonymous to the *pamtondo* tradition where women would share frustrations and aspirations when they met. These times provided an opportunity to break their routine house chores and sometimes even 'women abuse.' The skills they learnt gave them self worth as they saw a product created by themselves. Town dwellers had probably other alternatives of getting similar socio-economical goods, as such, did not see the value of such missionary activities.

The strength of family ties boosted the conversion rates in Jali. In many cases, it was the whole family that became Baptist. This was natural. Culturally it is very normal for families to choose to have a uniform belief system. This increases communication among family members and helps to build relationships. Many people become part of a church for social reason, such as, for burial or wedding. Such social goods are also usually appreciated in a context of a family and this may contribute as to why members of one family become Baptists. This was the case in Mauluka, Malikebu and Makolije villages in Jali area. The chief and family became Baptists and the chiefs became pastors of the congregation while their wives became pastors' wives.⁵⁷ In Nkhotakota, women's work also grew in numbers when chief Tambala, his children and villagers became Baptist. In cities, such family ties are much weakened and therefore would rarely be a basis for conversions.

Up to 1966, women's roles in Jali were restricted to support roles such as cooking and sewing. This was in tune with the missionary practice of the day. Local Malawians looked to the missionaries for bringing the church to their different areas, here was now more initiative from the local leadership to participate in the church.

Women in the earlier period were very traditional, for example, they were not allowed to leave their head uncovered. Even those that had long hair were supposed to cover their hair with a *duku* (head dress). With this cultural attitude, women in Jali did not participate in preaching, Blantyre Chichewa Baptist Churches were the only places where women could preach. Zomba area women likely lacked exposure to the outside world. Even though Lilongwe was in the city, the Christian cultures at that time may have influenced Baptist women not to preach. In this way, the women accommodated themselves to that culture. However, in general few women in all areas preached. What are the possible reasons for this in view that Baptist polity encourages equal participation?

⁵⁶ Interview Rev. Malikebu, Zomba Baptist Church

⁵⁷ In every case the chief had only one wife.

It is well argued that African Traditional Religion can not be an excuse for barring women from preaching but that culture gave prominence to women in matrilineal societies. But in some ways, it must be noted that women were sometimes constrained with some cultural laws. In Balaka for example, in Likudzi village, it is a sign of disrespect if a woman stands when speaking at a local court. It is culturally appropriate for her to respond to her case while sitting. This might be one of the causes for negative perceptions on women preaching in Church, as preaching involves speaking while standing.

Traditional concepts of holiness surrounding the menstrual cycle of women might also be a cause for marginalization of women in preaching. Isabel Phiri argues that such an assumption is incorrect because in Traditional African Religion it is not only those that did not menstruate that served at shrine such as that of Chisumphu cult. Further she also agrees that there are anthropologists such as Rangeley who have shown that women who served at such shrines did so before or after the menstruation age.⁵⁸ I argue that, regardless of the evidence as to whether African Traditional Religion allowed women in menstruation age or not serve at a shrine, menstruation culturally does symbolize uncleanness and this may have been taken seriously in the Christian religion in the earlier days than in the traditional religions. The missionary women also provided a role model for support roles. Since local women learnt about their Baptist faith from them, they followed their example in taking up roles in church and society.⁵⁹ In the study of Presbyterian women of Nkhoma Synod Isabel Phiri shows how single missionary women such as Anna Mair de Klerk, became leadership role models of the local women.⁶⁰ Helen van Koevering also how two single women, Bertha Healing and Florence Seddon, provided role models among the Nyanja women of Mozambique by 1931.⁶¹

4. Baptist Convention women 1967 to 1974⁶²

The foundation for women's work was laid by this time. Group conversions in Jali area and some in Blantyre and Lilongwe meant that local women's work had grown. By 1966, women's work had some key local women leaders and women's work was no longer solely dependent on missionary women but also local women. Mrs. Elizabeth Phiri, Nrs Mary Galatiya, and Mrs. Mary Makhaya were now theologically trained women. Local initiatives had started to surface, the tradition of waiting upon directives of missionary began to subside. During this period, women's work grew geographically. Many churches were started. In Jali area, for example, Baptist Churches were planted in Julius village and so on. As these new churches were planted, the local women did not depend on missionaries for discipleship, but on themselves. This kind of leadership prepared them for work out of their villages, districts and in a more organized way.

Women to other districts

⁵⁸ Isabel Phiri, *Women, Presbyterianism and Patriarchy, Religious Experience of Chewa women in Central Malawi*, CLAIM: Blantyre 1997. P. 31.

⁵⁹ In the study James Amanze made in Botswana, he found out that mission churches behaved in similar way to their sending home churches. See James Amanze, *African Christianity in Botswana: The case of African Independent Churches*, Gweru, p. 50.

⁶⁰ See: Isabel Phiri, *Women Presbyterianism and Patriarchy*, pp. 44-45

⁶¹ See: Helen van Koevering, "Dancing their Dreams: The Lakeshore Nyanja Women of the Anglican Diocese of Niassa". A Dissertation of Masters of Philosophy. Bristol: University of Bristol. 1999.

⁶² In the 1974, the WMU organization was officially introduced in Malawi.

1969, Mary Makhaya and her husband went to **Nkhotakota** at Chiya to be missionaries there. Her work was very much patterned on missionary policy. As a pastor's wife her work mainly involved teaching family values and home craft skills.⁶³ Apart from teaching Mrs. Makhaya influenced many women from Muslim background to join Baptist faith. Before she was in the Zambezi Evangelical Church, she had been a Muslim and this gave her an understanding of the Muslim faith.⁶⁴ One district examples of her ministry was through her daughter who befriended a daughter of a Muslim. Through their relationship, the Muslim daughter became a Baptist. Although the parents were angry, not long after, did they also become Baptists.⁶⁵ Mrs. Elizabeth Njolomole stayed in Blantyre only up to 1969. When she went to **Mzuzu** in the Northern region to be a missionary there

Women's roles

In 1967, Jali congregations experienced a progression in women's roles in church. In Ntokota Baptist Church, women assumed positions of treasurer and secretary.⁶⁶ Some women by then had started to serve as deacons. Such roles may seem insignificant but at this time, many other Christians churches did not have women serve in such capacities. Certainly, Baptist Convention women were more liberated in this area. However, the role of the deacon, is interesting in that it was present in many areas even where women were not involved in leadership positions of preaching. Women might have been more accommodated to this role because of the nature of the office. It deals with support roles such as visitations and hospitality which keep women in the background of the Church.

Although the women's organization was informally operational in the country in the early period, it was formally organized in 1974, in Lilongwe. It is interesting that the organization was formed later than the uniform was introduced in 1967. The reverse could have been more plausible. The reasons for the reversed order could only be speculative. The organization was set up with aims to fulfill. Conditions of how once should become a member were also put in place. The time was now ripe to introduce this complexity because there was then capable leadership to train women into it. The trainings were organized at the national level and were held annually in Lilongwe. The missionary women and trained local women theologians were key at disseminating the information on this organization.

At such meetings, Baptist women in all regions would be invited for teaching and training in these organizational developments apart from the traditional domestic skills lessons. This was done with an aim that information should easily be transmitted to others in their respective places. This was however not always possible, literacy was setback. As such information transmitted from such national meetings was at times not well transmitted to other areas. The most affected victim was Zomba area where women were highly illiterate. The information concerned the color of the uniform for example was different in Zomba region. Instead of women wearing a purple head-dress, they had a white one. Such confusion was not present in Blantyre and Lilongwe or elsewhere. Attendance at such meetings was very good because the missionaries used to provide transport to the meetings. Food and accommodation was also provided free by the missionaries.⁶⁷

⁶³ Interview, Hildah Mallungo, Area 25 Baptist Church, 14/3/2000

⁶⁴ Ibid.,

⁶⁵ Hany Longwe, MA Research notes, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Chancellor College.

⁶⁶ See Gazamiyala's journal

⁶⁷ Interview Mrs. Nanthambwe, Mauluka Baptist Church, Zomba.

Although there was organizational development the role of many women was mainly restricted to support roles such as singing praying, visitation and funeral engagement. But the development of the organization meant that women had a unified position in the church. In this way they became an important part in the life of the church.

5. Baptist Convention women 1974 to 1992

This was a period when Baptist work was initiated in many other areas, firstly through the concept of home missionaries. Mrs. Makhaya and Mrs. Njolomole were the first ones in Nkhotakota and Mzuzu respectively in the early 1970s. But during this later period, more home missionaries were sent out to start Baptist work elsewhere. The wives were to help their husbands start work and equipped to train and lead fellow women who would become Baptists. This is a period when local initiative of church work is more cemented. The Baptist Convention of Malawi was formed and run by local leadership. Although the leadership was for the whole church, it was only composed of men. However this leadership also helped in strategizing women's work because churches were started in different areas, women's work was also started. It is this body that planned and recruited home missionaries. The Baptist Church began to view themselves as ministers of their own people. They realized that it was not the missionary that was going to do the job but the locals themselves.

This is how women's work spread from Blantyre Chichewa congregations outside Blantyre to Chikwawa at Ngabu, from Falls Baptist Church in Lilongwe to other areas of Lilongwe, from Jali area to Migowi and so on. The methods of disseminating the Baptist faith were unique to this period. The main strategy of winning women and men to Baptist beliefs was through open air preaching. In this both women and men were involved. This was probably influenced by external influences. In the 1970s, there were interdenominational American preachers who conducted revival meetings in all the district in Malawi. Baptists seemed to have influenced by this strategy in bringing Baptist work to the districts. Some women were involved in preaching at open air meetings or in translation.⁶⁸

Theological training for women also continued in this period. However one did not have to go through theological college outside Malawi to be a home missionary. In Jali area, Mrs. Majomboshe became missionary wife without her husband going for any theological training. She was missionary's wife in Chiradzulu district.⁶⁹ However this was not intended to be so, but in some areas few were literate enough to go for theological training. More women went to Zimbabwe or Zambia Theological Seminary. As such, there was an increased volume of local leadership in Malawi. These faithfully inculcated the training given to them at the Seminary to the local women.

Christiana was the first woman to go to theological training with her husband, Wilfred Kalenga in Chikwawa area.⁷⁰ She went to Zambia Theological Seminary in 1979 and came back in 1980. She is well known in Malawi because of being a wife of a clergy politician during the fight for democracy in 1992. Although, the first Baptist church was started in early 1970s, just like in the Zomba area, there was no training pastor's wife in Chikwawa area because of high illiteracy levels. Mrs. Pompei with her husband started Nsomo Baptist Church 1976, but she and her husband were not theologically trained.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Mrs. Lillian Jonga was one of the translators. Interview Mrs. Margaret Nyika, Blantyre Baptist Church.

⁶⁹ Mrs. Maida, pastor's wife, Chayima Baptist Church

⁷⁰ Interview Christian Kalenga, Annual Women Genral Meeting, Lumbadzi Baptist Church, 05/05/2000

⁷¹ Interview Christiana Kalenga

After Christian Kalenga came back from training in Zomba, she became key in leading women's work in the Lower Shire. She helped train local women in women's work. Herself and other women such as Mrs. Sagonja, who was formerly a member of Evangelical Africa Church, Nambewe, Patricia, a widow, became valuable in teaching women the Baptist message. They also helped to plant Baptist churches with their male members of their Nsomo congregation by preaching at open air meetings. Through such meetings more women were added to the Baptist congregations in Chikwawa. In this way they really became agents of change.

According to Hany Longwe, Nsomo Baptist church, is the nucleus of the Baptist Churches in Lower Shire. It is from this point that Baptist work has spread in the Lower Shire. Lower Shire comprises Nsanje, Chikwawa and Thyolo. The area is dominated by Sena and Lomwe languages. The area is famous for worship of African Tradition Religions and Matthews Schoffeleers has written comprehensively about worship structures in this place.⁷² Although historically, some churches had already touched this area such as the Catholic Church and Blantyre Synod, by 1980, there were still many places where no church was established.⁷³ As a result the Baptist church became an option for some who had no church nearby to go to.⁷⁴ Women are also attracted to Baptist congregation in this area because their Baptist message accommodated the cultural challenges of the day. Women did not have to get married in church for them to be members. *Chinkhoswe* weddings were well accepted. Women of difficult marriages, for example Mrs. Sagonja, who came from a polygamous marriage, even became leaders in the church.⁷⁵

During this time, many women had been leaders of the women's organization. However, up until 1992, all these leaders had been wives of pastors, since the first leader in 1974, Mrs. Mary Galatiya to Mrs. Mallungo who was the last leader at the close of Malawi's autocratic rule in 1992.

Organisational progress

Although the organization was set up in the earlier period, it was still a new phenomenon in many areas. Depending on leadership development and literacy level, certain areas were more knowledgeable of the organizational development. The organization was now beginning to take form at the local congregation level. Women's work grew, churches were divided into associations, which were made up of a cluster of congregations. In Jali area, for example, the first association was Jali Association.⁷⁶ The development of associations formally began in 1985. However, since 1966, there had been already such informal associations to ease management of women's work.

Baptist Women as "Mbumba"

All women before democracy in 1992, were Dr Kamuzu Banda's Mbumba. They were the glory of the Ngwazi and of no one else including their husbands, if they were married. Husband who harassed wives

⁷² See Matthew Schoffeleers, *Religion and the Dramatisation of Life. Spirit Beliefs and Rituals in Southern and Central Malawi*, Blantyre: CLAIM, 1997.

⁷³ Christiana Kalenga, Annual Women's Conference, Lumbadzi Baptist Church, 05/05/2000

⁷⁴ For example, there was no church in Bile village in Chikwawa before Bile Baptist church was started. Interview, Mrs. Christina Kalenga, Annual Women's Conference, Lumbadzi Baptist Church, 05/05/2000.

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Interview David Lichapa, Makolije Baptist Church, 08/03/2000.

in any way and were reported to the party officials of the day were usually punished, severely on occasions. Women were to be respected by all men.⁷⁷ Baptist women were also Ngwazi's Mbumba. They accommodated themselves to the political context of the day. However sometimes they ran into problems when they were seen to compromise their Mbumba status. In Jali area in 1987, Baptist Convention women were accused of being Mbumba of Leroy Wester, the missionary in their area. This suspicion came about when the political party leaders saw the respect the women had for their missionary.⁷⁸ In any case, Wester became everything for the Baptist women. His wife and him provided these women with material comfort in the name of converting them to the Baptist message. Ngwazi's party on the other hand, asked women to buy cards. This was another expense for them. Baptist women like dancing as they sing their choruses. In the presence of the missionary they danced even more. This was seen as though Wester received the same honour from the women as Ngwazi did.

What broke the camel's back was when Mrs. Blanche Wester taught the women how to sew bags from sack cloth. Mrs. Wester was just being practical in that she chose material that was readily available and affordable by the majority. On top of the sack cloth bags, she taught the women how to sew an embroidery work to make it beautiful. Baptist women liked it.⁷⁹ But not all Baptist were happy with Wester. There was a group of locals who thought that Wester owned much worth while sharing little with them. These looked for a way of making Wester leave the country. In cooperation with women who supplied samples of sack bags they had made under the supervision of Mrs. Wester, they brought the bags to the party officials. At that time Mayi Makwinja was the women's league chairperson in Zomba district, Hon. Musa Gama was the Member of Parliament in Jali area, and Mr Mpunga was a party official in this area. The Baptist delegation told these party officials that Mrs. Blanche Wester was undermining Ngwazi's Mbumba by making sack cloth bags for them.⁸⁰ Fortunately this ordeal went in favour of Mrs. Wester and her husband when the other Baptist group defended Blanche Wester that the bags were just samples and that was in the process of making better ones.

On the whole, the time before democracy was not an easy one for Baptist Convention women. However church polity did not have any conditions of how women should involve themselves in politics. The self-conscious principles were upheld. In this every woman was free to do what they felt was right. In this way there were Baptist women who held political positions in the Malawi Congress Party. Mrs. Ng'oma was a branch women's league chair in Blantyre.⁸¹ In certain cases such positions were taken gladly but sometimes for fear that rejection would lead to punishment. The later was the case in Mrs. Ng'oma's case. She was actually chosen to the post in absentia.⁸²

Some Baptist women tried to run away from active participation in politics, but in most cases, they were easily discovered. Mrs. Kanowa of Balaka, one of the key Baptist Convention women in Malawi is a typical example. For a while, she tried to avoid dancing at party meetings. As a pastor's wife, she felt it was not good to dance for the Ngwazi. Unfortunately someone was marking her foot steps. She was going to be reported to high officials by one of the leaders when this person was involved in a car

⁷⁷ That this was more idea than reality can be concluded from: Peter Ngulube-Chinoko, "The Experience of women Under the One-Party State and in the Political Transition," in: Matembo S. Nzunda and Kenneth R. Ross (eds.), *Church, Law and Political Transition in Malawi, 1992-94*, Blantyre:CLAIM, 1995, pp. 89-100.

⁷⁸ Interview, Rev. Davidson Lichapa, Makolije Baptist Church, 08/03/2000

⁷⁹ Ibid.,

⁸⁰ Interview, Rev. Mauluka, Mauluka Baptist Church, Zomba.

⁸¹ Interview, Mrs. Mary Galatiya, Lukudzi Estate, Chipiriro Baptist Church, 15/05/2000

⁸² Ibid.,

accident which cost her an eye. She was admitted to hospital. When Mrs. Kanowa heard of the accident she asked friends to pray for her that would be an opportunity to be considered to church women who do not want to dance at Ngwazi's meetings. Through constant visitations Mrs. Kanowa made to this lady and people's prayers, this party official changed her attitude towards Mrs. Kanowa and assured to her that she was free to abscond dancing meetings and no party official would bother her. Since then Mrs. Kanowa was not bothered by party officials.

Some Baptist Convention women had to suffer because their husbands were unduly jailed because of preaching the Christian message. Mrs. Mary Galatiya suffered for months when her husband was imprisoned for preaching that Jesus was the only saviour of people in this world. During this period, Ngwazi was called the saviour of Malawi and it was an offence for Stephen Galatiya to say that there was no saviour apart from Jesus. This implied that Ngwazi was not the saviour.⁸³

During this time it was difficult to hold church meetings. When Ngwazi passed by the church, the women had to leave the church and stand by the roadside to clap for the Ngwazi.⁸⁴ It is clear that although Baptist believe in democracy, they could not be democrats in certain cases. Their democratic right was affected by the autocratic rule of Banda.

Current issues of Baptist Convention women 1992 to 2000

Baptist Convention women's work reached its peak in the later period and it leveled off during this period.⁸⁵ The push to win others to the Baptist faith seems to have slowed down. However, there are issues that are characteristic of this period. There are other issues which remain the same. Concerning women's roles in church and society for example, there is not much difference from the early period.

One notable change is that since 1992, there are lay women in the leadership of the women's organization at the national level. The changes took place when Martha Chirwa, a pastor's wife trained in Zimbabwe Theological Seminary took over. She is a woman of change and very accommodating to the practice of Baptist message. She took a deliberate move to encourage lay women to be involved in leadership.⁸⁶ Time had come also when Baptist women could no longer accept leadership of someone just because of clergy connections. Such acceptance was only possible in the times of autocratic rule when it was not possible to question leadership. Even on the world scene there was a zeitgeist of democracy and that could not be obstructed especially in a church which believes in democratic rights of its members.

The other change is that many Baptist Convention congregation that do allow women to preach on a normal Sunday. Most women do preach to fellow women normally during their mid week meetings and women conferences. In churches that have women preach on a normal Sunday, the period at which the women started assuming such a public role, varies from region to region. In Blantyre churches, it started since 1996, under the influence of Rev Stephen Galatiya.⁸⁷ In Zomba rural areas, women began to

⁸³ Interview, Rev Galatiya, Likudzi Estate, Chipiro Baptist Church, 15/05/2000.

⁸⁴ Interview Mrs. Botoman, Chisomo Baptist Church, Blabtyre.

⁸⁵ According to Rev Mauluka, fewer churches, are being planted these days. There is more emphasis on pastoring a church. Interview, Rev Mauluka, Mauluka Baptist Church.

⁸⁶ Interview, Mrs. Malungo, Mtendere Baptist Church, Lilongwe.

⁸⁷ Interview, Mrs. Mary Galatiya, Likudzi Estate, Chipiro Baptist Estate, 15/05/2000

preach only in 1999. In Mpinda Baptist Church, Mrs. Mwanakhu, a pastor's wife, was first to preach in a regular service. She was encouraged to do so when she saw that women did preach in Zomba Baptist Church. Mrs. Mwanakhu is treasurer of the women's organization in her region. This position has helped her to be in touch with other women out of her organization in her village church.⁸⁸ Zomba Baptist Church was the first in Zomba to have a woman preach on a normal Sunday. Teresa Day, a missionary was the first woman to do so in this congregation in 1993. Her public role was largely influenced by Dr Klaus Fiedler, who encouraged women leadership roles in church. Since then more women in Zomba Baptist church are preaching on a normal Sunday, in both the English and the Chichewa speaking service. In Lilongwe churches Baptist Convention women do preach on a regular Sunday. In Falls Baptist, Mrs. Kalanga was the first woman to do so in 1999. Her influence is traced from her involvement with an interdenominational organization, Women Aglow.⁸⁹ In Lumbadzi Baptist Church, Mrs. Banda, a deacon, Mrs. Nkhata a pastor's wife frequently preach on a normal Sunday. However, some congregation in both town and rural areas do not allow women to preach on a normal Sunday. In Blantyre Baptist Church, preaching is restricted to women's Sunday alone. In 1998, when Dr Klaus Fiedler preached in this congregation implying that women should preach, his sermon was met with resistance. A missionary couple left the church and told the leadership that it is wrong to have women preach in church. Unfortunately for him the church leadership was in agreement with Dr. Fiedler's sermon. The leadership emphasized that Baptists do believe in women and men taking up leadership in church and society and if there was anyone who had problems with that she or he was free to leave the church.⁹⁰

Most of the rural churches do not involve women in preaching. Some of such congregations as Mandawa in rural Zomba, do not even have a women's Sunday. Some congregations have encouraged women to preach, but it is the women who have rejected the offer. Such is the case at Soche Baptist Church and Livingstone Baptist Church in Blantyre. This disparity is well contained in Baptist churches because the authority of the Church is vested in the autonomy of the congregation. Each congregation is free to decide on what roles women should play without being forced to be uniform with others.

The role of women as deacons is widespread in many Baptist congregations in Malawi, however, even though such roles started in the 1960s some Baptist congregations do not have women deacons. This occurrence has nothing to do with Baptist policy but with influences from other church groups who do not involve women in such positions. The way how Baptist Convention women understand the bible as regards to women's roles is also influenced by biblical interpretations employed by women in other Churches.

The trend of women pastors in the rural areas as opposed to urban area is now fixed. There are currently four women pastors in Malawi, all are in rural areas. However, two are in Lilongwe rural and the other two are in rural Liwonde and Jali. The reason as to why there are no women pastors in the urban areas are speculative. It is possible that women pastors in the rural areas are seen in the same way as "Chiefs". In traditional African matrilineal societies, women have chiefs and it seems easier for Baptist Convention women in rural areas to be pastors. In fact, these women pastors are perceived by many as "caretakers of place." They do not administer sacraments such as Holy Communion, Baptism and

⁸⁸ Interview, Mrs. Mwanakhu, Mpinda Baptist Church, Zomba

⁸⁹ Women's Aglow is mainly found in the urban areas.

⁹⁰ Interview, Rev Akim Chirwa, Nov. 1998.

burying a dead person which the male pastors do. This marginalisation of women pastors in these key ministerial duties says something as to how women pastors are perceived in the church.

The disparity of women's roles between the matrilineal and patrilineal societies is very visible. In the Northern region, there is no woman pastor. Women do not preach at a normal Sunday as in the Central and Southern Region. Is it because Baptist Churches have just started in the North. This could be a possibility because except with Soche, Bangwe and Jerusalem Churches, women in other Baptist congregation waited for years before they could preach.

Such trend is in line with wide perceptions that women in patriarchal cultures are often oppressed by men. However, it is interesting that in Livingstonia Synod, women started preaching even earlier than the 1960s. One would think that Baptist Convention women in the North would be influenced by this occurrence. This is a possibility with time.

The wind of democracy has helped to show that indeed Baptist women behave differently in matters affecting their faith. As regards to supporting parties, Baptist support whatever party they want including Bakili Muluzi's regardless that he is a Muslim. Some of the women are actually UDF local leaders and are free to display their yellow colours in the church. Some are strong Congress supporters openly. Some are in other parties. The only unity Baptist women have is that they called Baptists. Other than that there are variations among them and this is what makes them better agents of change and accommodation.

Conclusion

"Sheep stealing" or "sheep running away".

Conversion stories show that a good number of women left other churches to join Baptist churches either by following a husband or as individuals. This trend has received a lot of criticism from other churches. The Baptist church has been labeled a church in "sheep stealing" business. Conversion stories, however, show that Baptist Conversion Churches only receive "sheep running away" from former churches. They provide acceptance to those women who have been rejected by their former churches either through discipline, long catechism classes, lack of "proper" church wedding among others. Baptist women do not need to have a church wedding for them to be accepted as full members of the church. Throughout history, *chinkhoswe* weddings have been well accepted. Because of this, women who were disciplined because of lack of church wedding find acceptance in a Baptist church.

Baptist Convention women involved women in leadership roles, regardless of social status. Single women such as single from birth, divorcees, widows have been involved in leadership roles since the 1960s. Such a privilege is denied in other churches. Single women are barred from being leaders in Nkhoma Synod for example.

Even though Baptist Convention women show much flexibility in roles they have played in church and society they need to aspire for more change. Even though ordination is not an issue they need to begin to discuss it because the issue is tabled widely in many churches in Malawi and in the world. It needs to be discussed because other churches do have women in ordained ministry. Currently, there are Baptist women who have either finished theological training or are finishing theological training. Some of these

might be interested to be ordained as pastors. Even though not all men are ordained pastors, some are ordained. This presents enough challenge to call for ordination of women in the Baptist Convention.