

PARTNERPLAN

Ken Ross - Malawi February 2024

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Dear friends,

Many years ago, when I was preparing to come to Malawi for the first time, there was a valedictory service for our family in Edinburgh. The minister who led the prayer at the service was called Richard Baxter and I later learned that he had served in Malawi himself at an earlier time, in the 1950s and 1960s.



I cannot remember everything that he included in the prayer but one thing I do recall is that he prayed that we would be enriched by the heritage of faith that was represented by Harry Kambwiri Matecheta and Stephen Kundecha. It was the first time I had heard these names. Little did I imagine that thirty-six years later I would be publishing a little book about the two of them.

This, however, is what has just occurred - perhaps an answer to Richard's prayer. The two men have indeed become inspirational figures for me, as they are for many others here in Malawi. They were the first two to be selected for training as ministers when the Blantyre Mission decided, in 1907, that the time had come to establish an African ministry.

This fact alone gives them a unique place in history. But what is more remarkable is the calibre of the two men – which is what I have tried to capture in the book. Matecheta, for example, had witnessed as a teenager the last big Ngoni raid on the Shire Highlands where he lived. Ten years later he left his own Yao people to become a missionary among the Ngoni. As he put it, “In 1884 the Ngoni brought war to our villages; in 1893 we took the gospel to their villages.”

He spent the rest of his life among the Ngoni and was buried next to the church at Bemvu where I now serve as associate minister. It was therefore a bit special on Sunday 28 January when I was able to present some copies of the new book to the congregation who are his living legacy. His memory continues to inspire.

The book is a small one, really a booklet, and is part of a new series that aims to publish small but meaningful contributions – the Luviri Occasional Papers. Luviri Press is an innovative publisher, based in the north of Malawi, and its new series aims to identify seminal articles, some previously published but no longer readily available and others newly written, and to publish them in booklet form.

Another current book project is on a much bigger scale. This year the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, which grew out of the Scottish Missions in Malawi, will mark its centenary, having

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been formed in 1924. Last year Zomba Theological University held a Research Conference to attempt some academic analysis of the 100 years of the CCAP. Since then, my assignment, working closely with Mwawi Chilongozi, Secretary General of the CCAP General Assembly, has been to turn the conference papers into a book that can be published in time for the centenary celebrations in August this year. There has been terrific collaboration in this effort and now the book is very close to going to press. We plan to have a print edition circulating in Malawi and also an open-access digital edition.



Meanwhile another academic year is underway at ZTU and healthy recruitment into our Masters programmes has been keeping me busy with admission and orientation of new students. It is exciting to welcome new students who are highly motivated to realise their academic potential. A significant development in our taught-track Masters is that the enrolment is close to 50-50 between women and men. A generation ago,

access to theological education in Malawi was largely restricted to men so there has been quite a sea change. With more than fifty postgraduate students currently enrolled, the programme has grown rapidly and challenges our capacity to provide quality supervision. Nevertheless, the University is eager to continue to expand its postgraduate work and further programmes are in the pipeline.

For most Malawians this is a time of hope but also anxiety as the crops are planted and the question is whether or not it will be a favourable growing season. The rains came late this year, arriving in many places on Christmas Day, but were plentiful in the month of January, getting the crops off to a good start. All around are fields full of healthy maize plants – now they need a few weeks of steady rainfall to enable them to mature and produce a good harvest. This is the prayer of almost every Malawian, with many still recovering from the devastation brought by Cyclone Freddy last year.

Wishing you well as you journey through the winter season in Scotland and praying for all who are working hard to help the Church meet the special challenges of this time.

In friendship,

Kenneth

Please pray for:

- The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian preparing to celebrate its centenary – for a moment of thanksgiving and also renewal.
- The living legacy of the ministry of Harry Kambwiri Matecheta – that his memory might inspire the congregation at Bemvu as it seeks to meet today's challenges.
- Zomba Theological University with its high ambitions and many challenges – for a fruitful academic year in 2024.
- The people of Malawi tending their crops and needing steady rainfall to bring them to maturity.