

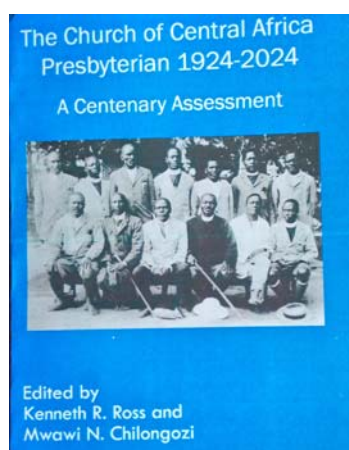
PARTNERPLAN

Ken Ross - Malawi April 2024

Zomba Theological College
PO Box 130
Zomba
Malawi
kross@thinkingmission.org

Dear friends,

I hope this finds you well and enjoying the signs of Spring in Scotland. I hope to join you soon and look forward to opportunities to reconnect with friends and partners in the May-June period.



Meanwhile, here in Malawi, this is a big year for the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian – the church which grew out of Scottish missionary work from the later years of the 19th century. By the early 20th century, the missions had already produced churches with their own African leaders. Initially, these were quite fragmented and scattered across different parts of the country. But the missionaries and the African leaders developed a hope that they might form one church to unite Christians right across the land. In 1924 their dream came true as the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) was formed, aiming to be a nationwide body. Hence 2024 marks the centenary and it is time for celebration.

My small part in this enterprise has been on the academic side. Last year we convened a conference to assess the significance of the hundred years of the CCAP. A broad spectrum of CCAP leaders and scholars offered papers and over the past year I have been working with colleagues to edit these into a book. Now the book is rolling off the press and we will be able to present it as a gift to the centenary celebration.

The book is celebratory in tone, recognizing how much there is for which to be thankful. From small beginnings the CCAP has grown to the point where today it can count more than 3,100,000 members. At the beginning it comprised just three Presbyteries, now there are more than 100. The Presbyterian system lends itself to church growth – when a Presbytery grows too big to be manageable it can simply split in two. This is happening today all over the country to accommodate exponential growth. By and large, local congregations are vibrant, with the Women's Guild a potent force and the churches thronged with young people.

The CCAP also plays a major role in national life. It makes a very significant contribution to the provision of education and healthcare, as well as running a wide range of community development projects. It has had its ups and downs with the Government, but the church enjoys the trust of the people and can call the Government to account when required. In the Foreword to our book, Malawi's President Dr Lazarus Chakwera has recognized the foundational role played by the CCAP in national life.

Since our book is an academic endeavour, it also has to raise some critical points and many of these revolve around the question of church unity. Often to its own frustration, the CCAP has

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struggled across the entire 100 years to fully achieve the unity for which it was created. The Scots have to take their share of the blame for this – though they were enthusiastic about the unity achieved in 1924 they continued to concentrate authority and resources in their separate Missions, influenced by the colonial mentality that prevailed at the time. Even as they united, they built in division. The CCAP has found it hard to recover from this. Indeed, in later history the divisions have been reinforced by ethnic and political factors. Thus, many of the contributors to the book focus on causes of disunity in the CCAP and ways of building greater cohesion and unity for the future. Might the centenary be an opportunity to address this long-running issue in fruitful ways?



Meanwhile the first semester at ZTU is drawing to a close. It has been a lively one with rewarding students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. One item that is rising on our agenda, as it needs to be on everyone's, is the climate catastrophe that is intensifying year by year. Some are inclined to continue with business as usual, hoping that some magical solution will turn up. At ZTU we take a different view, so we are thinking about how to do

things differently as we try to make our very small contribution to meeting the crisis.

Currently, we have conceived a six-pronged plan with the aim that we should play our part as a theological institution. 1) Research grants to incentivize postgraduates to work on ecological themes. 2) Adding an ecotheological section to the library. 3) More solar power for our buildings. 4) Making better use of our land – orchards, flower gardens and vegetable gardens. 5) Eliminating plastic bags from the University campus. 6) Equipping students on practical placements in local churches to raise environmental awareness and plant trees in deforested areas.

Besides being a milestone year for the CCAP, 2024 also marks the 60th anniversary of Malawi's independence. You might not be entirely surprised to hear that this has got me involved in another book project – this time aiming to take account of Malawi's sixty years as an independent nation. The mood around this is rather sombre, mainly because the economic climate is not at all favourable right now. This leads people to ask whether there is really anything to celebrate and there is much soul-searching. We hope that our book can provide a balanced account and some pointers for the future.

I am very aware that these are challenging times in Scotland too in a variety of ways and send all good wishes as you navigate sometimes stormy seas.

With warmest regards,

Ken

Please pray for:

- The CCAP as it marks its 100-year milestone, that this might be a platform for greater unity and continued growth in the future.
- The Malawi nation as it celebrates the 60th anniversary of its independence, that it will find fresh inspiration to meet contemporary challenges.
- ZTU postgraduate students who are pioneering new programmes, including the first cohort of Masters students now working on finishing their dissertations.
- Malawi farmers gathering in their harvest, with mixed results – for resilience and adaptation to changing conditions.
- ZTU seeking to raise its game in ecological responsibility – that it might be able to offer significant leadership.