



BOOK NOTE REVIEW

Fiedler, Klaus, and Kenneth R. Ross, eds. *Christianity in Malawi: A Reader*. Mzuzu, Malawi: Mzuni Press, 2021. Pp. 596. £50.00 (paperback).

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In 2020, the editors released *A Malawi Church History 1860–2020*. To explore Malawi's church history more deeply, two companion volumes were published the following year: *Christianity in Malawi: A Source Book*, edited by Kenneth R. Ross, and the present volume, *Christianity in Malawi: A Reader*. While the Source Book offers a collection of primary texts, this Reader presents a broader range of secondary sources.

This book is a treasure trove for anyone passionate about church history. It features contributions from a variety of authors on diverse topics related to Christianity in Malawi over the past two centuries. To name just a few: **Andrew C. Ross** writes about the quarrel between the Blantyre Mission of the Church of Scotland and the British Central Africa Administration. **Beverly Lacayo** discusses sisterhoods and the empowerment of women in Central and East Africa. **Wiseman C. Chirwa** delves into the religious and political activities of Msokwa Elliot Kamwana Chirwa in Nkhata Bay. **Silas S. Ncozana** highlights the influential role of the women's guild — known as *Mvano* — in spreading the gospel. **L. A. H. Msukwa's** chapter on the role of churches in Malawi's development is also particularly insightful. In addition, the book includes chapters on the involvement of Afrikaners (specifically the Dutch Reformed Church) in the Malawian church, as well as several contributions focused on Seventh Day Baptists.

Rather than summarizing all 19 chapters, I will highlight what I consider the true gem of this volume: **Roderic J. Macdonald's** chapter on Reverend Hanock Msokera Phiri and the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Nyasaland. This chapter skillfully interweaves themes of African independence, Afro-American missionary work, and political

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connections to Hastings Kamuzu Banda, Malawi's first president. Hanock Msokera Phiri, Banda's nephew, was born in Kasungu — now in Malawi's central region — and, like Banda, pursued further education and work in South Africa. It was in Boksburg, Transvaal (now Gauteng), that Phiri encountered the AME Church. After being ordained by American Bishop Vernon, he returned to Malawi as an evangelist to plant AME churches and build schools. Phiri was not a lone actor. He served as a bridge-builder, working in cooperation with the Dutch Reformed Church Mission, the Universities' Mission to Central Africa, the Roman Catholic White Fathers Mission, and the Livingstonia Mission of the United Free Church of Scotland. His ecumenical collaborations created pathways for many of his students to pursue studies abroad. One of them, Hastings Kamuzu Banda, went on to study medicine at Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee. Unfortunately, the AME Church in South Africa later lost interest in the Nyasaland initiative, hindering the long-term establishment of a strong AME presence in Malawi.

This book opens many windows into the country's rich ecclesiastical history. However, it primarily presents a Protestant perspective. Pentecostal churches are not discussed at all, and there is no attention given to children's ministry, such as Sunday school education.

The compilation itself seems somewhat rushed. While each article includes an introduction, some of the introductions include more background information from the respective author. Other chapters lack that information (it is, for example, unclear who Roderic J. Macdonald is). The physical production of the book is also disappointing. The cover of my copy is glued on crookedly, many pages are unevenly cut, and after just one read, the binding begins to fall apart. For a book priced nearly US\$60 at Amazon and £50 at African Book Collective (though those who can purchase the book locally in Malawi are afforded a more reasonable price), the production quality is poor.

In summary, *Christianity in Malawi: A Reader* includes several outstanding contributions. However, the overall presentation leaves much to be desired, suggesting the book may have been brought to market prematurely. Nonetheless, Fiedler and Ross have compiled a work that, for historians and church history enthusiasts, richly recounts the great works of God in the Warm Heart of Africa.