

**The role of the churches in human rights advocacy: The Case of Malawian members of Jehovah's Witnesses, their accounts of stories and memories as victims of religious persecution from 1964 to 1994**

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## ABSTRACT

Through the life history and narrative approach, this study collects and documents the life experiences of members of Jehovah's Witness in Malawi for thirty years (between 1964 when Malawi got her independent, to 1994 when democracy came). The mentioned period covers the time when Malawi was under one-party system, ruled by an autocratic leader Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda and his party Malawi Congress Party (MCP). During this time, members of Jehovah's Witness became victims of religious persecution for refusing to buy Malawi Congress Party membership card. It was a requirement by law for every born Malawian citizen living in Malawi to buy the MCP membership card.

The theories of Prophetic Diakonia (Diakonia in Context: 2009), Ecumenical Diakonia (Ferguson and Ortega, World Council of Churches: 2002) and the Freedom of Religion as a Human Right (Boyle and Sheen: 1997) guided in analyzing this study. The theories enabled this study to critically look at the role of the churches in Malawi during this same period, to analyze response of the churches in fighting against injustice towards members of Jehovah's Witness in Malawi. The study has shown the changing positions of the churches in Malawi, in their fight for human rights and becoming a prophetic voice.

The study findings include the details of persecution that members of Jehovah' Witness experienced which include; detentions, beatings, burning of houses, destruction of crops, discrimination, forced to flee the country, death and the silent churches. Using the theories of prophetic diakonia and ecumenical diakonia, the study does reveal that the churches in Malawi compromised their prophetic voice.

## **DEDICATION**

### ***To my grandparents***

Late Mr. Flighton Kaiya (Madala) and Agogo Mayi Liness Kaiya

### ***To my parents***

Rev. Fletcher & Mrs. Clara Kaiya

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## **ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS**

CCAP	: Church of Central Africa Presbyterian
CCJP	: Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace
DRCM	: Dutch Reformed Church Mission
ECM	: Episcopal Conference of Malawi
EAM	: Evangelical Association of Malawi
FGD	: Focus Group Discussion
JW	: Jehovah's Witness
MCC	: Malawi Council of Churches
MCP	: Malawi Congress Party
PAC	: Public Affairs Committee
WTBTS	: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### **The role of the churches in human right advocacy: The Case of Malawian members of Jehovah's Witness, their accounts of stories and memories as victims of religious persecution for the period of three decades**

##### **1.1 Introduction and Research Question**

This study is going to document some of the experiences of religious persecution, religious freedom and the churches' role in human rights advocacy in Malawi. The focus is going to be on the members of Jehovah's Witnesses and their historical experiences as victims of religious persecution, between 1964 and 1994. I will be looking into what happened to them and their families, what the response of the society to the atrocities committed was. Another emphasis will be on the response of the churches<sup>1</sup> in Malawi to the persecutions of Jehovah's Witnesses.

I would like to make it clear that I am not referring to a specific church or denomination. I will not dwell on all the differences in doctrinal teachings among other things. Rather, I am referring to the <sup>2</sup>Church defined as the body of Christ with many members. Therefore, I am not going to dwell on the diversity of the churches, but on the Church as one body and its role in advocating human rights. Furthermore, I will discuss the Malawian Jehovah's Witnesses movement from below; that is, from the perspective of members and their situation, even though I will give my thought on the perspective of the hierarchical structure, of the Jehovah's Witness, it is not my focus.

The research question that this study is trying to answer is:

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<sup>1</sup>Here the churches refer to the mainline churches in Malawi including those that form Malawi Council of Churches, Evangelical Association of Malawi and the Roman Catholic Church. It is important to note that the Jehovah's Witness are not associated with the bodies above.

<sup>2</sup> The Church and churches will be used interchangeably

*‘With the focus on Jehovah’s Witness, what are the historical realities experienced by the victims of religious persecution in Malawi during the period of 1964 – 1994, and which role did the church play in this situation and to what extent was that role played, and subsequent attempts of reconciliation with members Jehovah’s Witness.*

I will analyze the Church’s role in Malawi today, are there any changes in the Church’s role, in her fight for justice for all, and were there any lessons drawn from the past. How has the Church continued to empower herself by increasingly becoming a prophetic voice speaking out against injustices in her society? Again the study will try to find out the possibility of the Church in Malawi to initiate the process of how to bring healing to the religious victims and society as a whole, therefore, coming to terms with reconciliation.

In answering the research question, I am going to look into the following three objectives;

- To give a description and record the historical realities experienced by the victims of religious persecution in Malawi; experiences of members of Jehovah’s Witnesses between 1960 to 1990’s
- To explore the role that the Church played in enhancing or subsiding the religious freedom and human rights in Malawi between 1960’s to 1990’s in connection with the Jehovah’s Witness situation
- To analyze the Church in Malawi today as a civil society in the area of empowerment, being a prophetic voice and advocating for religious freedom and human rights.

The Church has a responsibility of speaking for the voiceless and the marginalized; the church’s ministry to the people should be inclusive of all people. “Therefore it has to be prophetic, lifting up the dignity of the excluded and marginalized, denouncing the powers that seek justice and life only for themselves, announcing ways of promoting human values and wellbeing for all” (Nordstokke, 2011:27). In the mentioned decades in Malawi, what did the Church do? Was the Church able to do something at all? Did they have the capacity to stand up and point out the wrongs in the society? Could the Church have acted differently? Did she assume her role of being a prophetic voice? The Church exists not in isolation, but in a society and it is her responsibility to communicate not only the truth about God’s word, but also fight

for the good of people and promote human dignity. The Church cannot disassociate herself from the everyday struggles of people within the society, which the church does exist.

Freedom of religion has been a struggle and experienced by many different religious groups in the world. In some cases this struggle remains to be an on-going fight. Christianity is not spared in this ordeal; looking back in the Christian history we see how early Christians struggled to have the freedom of worship under the Roman Empire. However, the Constantine turn in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and the Church was linked to power and became in cases a part of the oppressive system. Again there have been times when Christians have experienced the freedom of worship and enjoyed that freedom. Christianity started facing opposition from the very beginning of its establishment and despite of all efforts to destroy it, Christianity continued to spread and today two thousand years later, it still exists almost in all parts of the world, even though at a significantly lower level in some parts of the world nonetheless, it remains a strong religion in many African countries.

In their book 'Freedom of Religion and Belief' a world report, Boyle and Sheen wrote an article about Malawi "Human rights protection guaranteeing the right to free conscience had been included in the constitution of 1964, but were removed within three years of its coming into effects. Malawi under Banda saw little systematic denial of freedom of conscience, except with regard to some traditional practices that the state deemed to amount to 'witchcraft' and the persecution or exclusion of some religious minorities, most notably the Jehovah's Witnesses.... An informal presidential decree blocked the establishment of religions that were not registered with the government". (Boyle and Sheen, 1997:37)

This thesis will focus on historical analysis of religious freedom in Malawi before the multiparty and democratic government in 1994. Telling how a people of religious minority group were ill-treated, because they believed differently from the majority, and their refusal to purchase the required party membership cards that the government had introduced. I will also look into the responsibility of the churches in fighting for the marginalized of the society and its diaconial mandate. I am explaining more about diakonia in the sixth chapters.

This study seeks to systematically collect record and analyze the experiences and the perceptives of the victims of religious persecution of members of Jehovah's Witness in Malawi. The study will help find out how people have come to terms with what they went through and how they are coping with the reality of their horrible past experience and subsequent attempts to reconciliation. Look into how they have been able to move forward, as individuals and as an organization considering the persecution that they went through. Also in this study reconciliation gaps will be identified to perceive if there is any possibility of coming to terms with reconciliation.

## **1.2 Inspiration**

My inspiration choosing to write this topic comes from a desire to document and shed more light on the untold stories of persecution of members of Jehovah's Witness in Malawi.

My grandfather was a member of a '*Wachitawara*'; a faction that broke out of Jehovah's Witness in Malawi. I remember growing up and hearing so many stories of how the Malawi Congress Party persecuted him together with his friends who belonged to the same belief; there were accounts of my grandfather being beaten and arrested because of affiliation with the Jehovah's Witnesses. My parents belonged to different denomination – Baptist, nevertheless I never stopped wondering what it might be like for my grandparents, together and their friends who were members of Jehovah's Witness, who suffered as victims of religious persecution.

More emphatically, it was in search for answers about what did the churches in Malawi do in response to the persecution? Was there anything that the churches could have done? Furthermore, most of those who experienced severe persecution are either dead or very old, so I set to meet those still alive and hear their stories.

Today the churches in Malawi do speak out when there are violations of human rights; I have a keen interest to know what role the churches played when the government committed those atrocities. Was there empathy on the side of the churches towards the victims of religious persecution? Lastly, this paper will be a resource in Malawi as the nation as a historical record of events, also adding to the field of knowledge.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter seeks primarily to explain how this thesis paper has been written; the materials used and the steps taken to get data and information. It also explains what type of research paper this is, giving a description of the process followed to come up with this thesis paper. I will explain the data collection process, the sources of materials, and what methods used to come up with this thesis paper. It also includes the process of choosing the participants for interviews.

This is the case study of the Jehovah's Witnesses' experiences in Malawi "Case study thus is particular, descriptive, inductive and ultimately heuristic – It seeks to 'illuminate' the readers understanding of an issue (Somekh and Lewin, 2005:33); This is a case study of the historical event, in this respect giving an understanding of the Jehovah's Witnesses persecutions in Malawi for the period of close to thirty years, and the role that the churches played during the same period (1960's to 1990's). "...the single-case study is structured in ways that parallel analytic induction (Ragin, 2011:133). Here, I will try to gather facts that are relevant to the freedom of religion, human rights and the church's' influence in the political sphere in Malawi.

#### **2.2 Literature**

The literature review will cross-cut other disciplines to direct the focus on the research question and rationalize the need for the study at the same time remaining open to what the field texts in the study show. I will look into what has been already written on religious freedom, religion and human rights and much focus will be on the diakonia. Relevant literature will help to draw the scope limit of this study. (Butler-Kisber, L 2010:28).

#### **2.3 Interviews and Dialogues**

Different types of data sources have been used to gather information one of which included interviews. Interviews were conducted with different respondents; those who in this case

present the Church in Malawi<sup>3</sup> and other individuals who are members of Jehovah's Witnesses. I had a two month period to conduct interviews in the field (Malawi); everything had to be done within this time limit of two months. However, I tried to schedule and conducted interviews in agreement and convenience of the participants. The participants of the interviews were members of Jehovah's Witness, mainly I was interested in those who experienced persecution between mid - 60's to mid - 90's in Malawi; this was done to get information on their experiences; this means most of my respondents were old people

Prepared was necessary both before and in the process of conducting interviews in order to have the successful interview sessions. By asking questions that were open-ended, this allowed me to catch all important information and details. As an interviewer it was important to remain an active in guiding the participants during the interview process to help them retrieve the memories of the past at the same time not influencing the answers that were given, by not asking leading questions. I actively listened and got important points, and most of the conversations were recorded, to ensure that nothing important was missed out.

The interviews were done both in English and Chichewa with the Church leaders and the women Focus Group Discussion respectively. Prior to the interviews, partially, I had some knowledge of what the Jehovah's Witnesses experienced through grandparents who belonged to Jehovah's Witness growing up I had an opportunity to hear some of their stories regarding their faith and experiences.

The interviews were conducted in Blantyre, Lilongwe and Ntcheu. The interviews were categorized in two groups; the One on One In-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD's). The one on ne In-depth interviews were conducted in two different groups, with the leaders of church institutions, and with the victims of percussion. I interviewed the coordinator of Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), the General Secretary of Evangelical Association of Malawi (EAM), members of Jehovah's Witness who were present at the time of persecution, and with a former member of Jehovah's Witness but was present at the time of persecution. In addition, I conducted one focus group discussion (FGD) with female members of Jehovah's Witness who were present and experienced the persecution between the years of 1960's and 1990's.

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<sup>3</sup> General Secretary of Evangelical Association of Malawi and Acting Director of Catholic Commission of Justice

The women's FGD was chosen because they were the ones available and I must mention that most of them were very old and widows, over the years their husbands had died. It was not easy to find male members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, however; I managed to get two male individual separately and interviewed them too. In total six interviews were conducted; two with church leaders of church institution and three with members of Jehovah's Witness who underwent through the persecution, and one focus group discussion.

During the interviews, notes were taken, the conversations were recording, with the consent from the participants, and later the interviews were transcribed word for word. After the transcribing, coding technique with highlighter was used to find the emerging themes from the findings. Not only were the themes identified, but also noting the key words in context and finding words that were often repeated. The themes have been interpreted using the theories that I will describe in the theory chapter. The study's research is qualitative research.

## **2.4 Qualitative Method**

Qualitative methods are generally identified with ethnographic study and in-depth interviewing. As described above, my approach in this research paper has been in-depth interviews and not ethnographic which involves spending time and living in the context of the research. This is paper is more of a historical case study my focusing on interviews to construct connection with participants, hearing their stories and how they make sense out of those stories. "Qualitative methods are holistic, meaning that aspects of cases are viewed in the context of the whole case, and researchers often must triangulate information about a number of cases in order to make sense of one case (Ragin, 2011:134). Every voice important, the verbatim quotes have been included actively listening to people as they narrate their life stories. Creswell's defines qualitative research as;

“...a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of the research involves emerging the questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data”. (Creswell, 2009:4).

## 2.5 Life History and Narrative Approach

Even though this is not a biography work, I chose to use the life history and narrative approach because it was necessary for this research work to have stories of individuals' experiences narrated. This was one of the sources of information in this study.

I got into dialogues with people, listening to their stories and their experiences of persecution and the stories were being told from memory. As Chase (1995) has been quoted in the *'Research Methods in the Social Sciences'* when conducting "life history interview participants must take narrative seriously", here I would add that the participants must understand the importance of telling their stories as well, and be willing to tell them and in the process find meaning in telling their stories and that if you want to hear stories rather than reports then the task of an interviewer is to invite others to tell their stories (Somekh and Lewin.2005:156)

“Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experiences. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place of series of places, and in social interactions with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up peoples' lives, both individual and social. (Butler-Kisber, 2010:65)

“Narrative inquiry is concerned with the production, interpretation and representation of storied accounts of lived experience” (Somekh B, and Lewin C, 2005:156).The extent of persecution of the Jehovah's Witness was laid out, narrating every experience that could be remembered and their association with the Jehovah's Witness. The stories in this case were told from memories. And with permission from the participants, conversations were recorded, others were videotaped.

“Empirical material for life histories can come from a range of sources but often an oral history or a story of experience told in an interview will be a primary source of data. The conduct of the life history inquiry is built upon recognition that stories of life are constructed through narrative and dialogue.” (Somekh B, and Lewin C, 2005 p.157)

## **2.6 Selection of Participants**

Participants were selected differently to take part in the interviews. Others were randomly selected depending on the availability, and still others were recommended by other people who knew that they belonged to the Jehovah's Witness at the time when Dr. Kamuzu Banda was the leader of Malawi and the experienced persecution. Leaders of church related institutions were selected because on their connection to churches and that they ecumenically work with different denominations and are connected with the mainline churches in Malawi. Also they implement activities that are can be considered as diaconal in their nature. The individuals interviewed had to have belonged to Jehovah's Witness and were present at the time of persecution during the period extended from 1960's to 1990's.

The stories of people and their experiences have been told not basically in the chronological order but in a seemingly logical and necessary order determined by themes from the findings. "The events in our lives happen in a sequence in time, but in their significance to ourselves they find their own order, a timetable not necessarily perhaps not possibly chronological. The time as we know it subjectively is often the chronology that stories and novels follow: It is a continuous thread of revelation". (Somekh B, and Lewin C, 2005 p.158)

## **2.7 Challenges and Limitations**

Not all planned interviews were conducted due to different factors: Firstly it was hard to find the right people to interview because most people who were present during the persecution of the Jehovah's Witnesses are now old and are based in their retirement villages, where geographically it was not easy to access. Others have died over the years, and still some left the country at the time of persecution and never returned back home. An effort was made to conduct an interview with the current leadership of Jehovah's Witness in Malawi at their headquarters in Lilongwe, but they vehemently refused to take part in any interviews. Attempts were also made to conduct an in-depth interview with the General Secretary of Malawi Council of Churches (MCC) but all scheduled interviews kept being cancelled by the General Secretary of MCC, until my field time (two months) was finished and I had to come back to Norway where this paper was being written. So time limitation on the field was another challenge when collecting data.

There is a limitation of material existing on the chosen topic, especially in the context where the events took place. However, I will rely much on the articles written on the subject, also on the church & advocacy, human rights, history of Malawi and other relevant literature. Most of the respondents were old and had difficulties recalling everything concretely at a fast pace therefore, continual repetitions of questions and much patience were required in order to have the necessary information, without making them feel uncomfortable.

The transcribing was done by the researcher and also with the help from others, even though much effort was put to transcribe field text in word for word in order to comprehend everything that was said, it has its own limitations as explained by Mishler and Ochs "...transcripts are not neutral texts that reconstruct a carbon copy what has been recorded and /or observed. They are constructions, always partial and selective, and value laden and can represent potential power differentials that merit attention. Just the way a transcript is laid out on the page and the punctuation, pauses and silences are signified, or not, can suggest hierarchical differences (Butler-Kisber, 2010:29)

When I was conducting interviews, I tried a couple of times to hold an interview with the leaders of Jehovah's Witness in Malawi at their headquarters office in Lilongwe, but they strongly refused. After so much insistence they clearly indicated that they were not going to give me any chance to conduct interviews on the behalf of Jehovah's Witnesses leadership and they plainly said "we do not do interviews".

## **2.9 Ethical Deliberations**

Given the fact that the researcher is familiar with the culture and the place where data collection took place, it was easier to interact with people, in local language without interpretation where the margin of error might be wider. Interviews were conducted after consent was given by the interviewees, mainly verbal consent as this was enough because some of them were old women who never went to school and unable to read or write. It was made sure that the interviewees understood the purpose of the interviews. It was stated that they could drop the interview if they so wish to and that there won't be any problem if they

decide to do so. Again, the interviewees were allowed to answer only what they wanted and felt that they could answer. Refer to Appendix A for a consent form.

All the interviews were conducted from the homes of the participants as they preferred.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THEORETICAL APPROACH

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the theories that have been used in this study. There are three theories that have been used in this paper; the theories are going to be applied mainly in the discussion and analysis chapter of this paper. These theories include; Life History and Narrative Approach, this one has mostly been applied in the earlier stage of collecting data through interviews, and is included in the methodology chapter as well. The second theory that will be used is Advocacy and Ecumenical Diakonia, and lastly is Freedom of Religion as a Human Right.

#### 3.2 Life History and Narrative Approaches

The recording of oral history of what members of Jehovah's Witness went through, helps to bring to light these realities. It is also worth noting that it might help the victims feel recognized and that what they went through matters after all, the voices of the marginalized people is important not only the widely held historical recordings. Being able to tell one's own story can be therapeutic, nonetheless let me point it out that during interviews the participants were eager to tell their stories and that somehow find purpose in what they had gone through.

In no way I am suggesting that few hours of interacting with participants who suffered harassment for years could bring some sort of 'healing' to them, by simply letting them narrate their life experiences in an interview, because what they went through is much more profound and again therapy is not the intention of the study. But it is to give an account of their experiences, together with the researcher and the interviewees drawing out interpretation of their life's stories, in this case in the view of the researcher. "Life histories allow the inquirer to introduce additional anchor points for understanding the subjective and the structural as mutual informants in understanding our own and other people's lives". (Somekh and Lewin 2005 p.156)

Here narratives need to be taken seriously in an inquiry, the dialogue happenings where participants perform together in an ongoing, non-linear process that leads towards the construction of an account. The participants were invited to tell their stories, encouraging

them to take responsibility for the meaning of their talk. Here it is important to note a challenge that comes with this theory, of life history and narrative approach, it is not the researcher's story; it is the story of others and will be interpreted through my own experience, assumptions and knowledge and the interpretation will be based on that and with the privilege of writing this thesis I get to write their story through my glasses. There will be the use of documents such as published newspaper articles, yearbooks, and other historical books that touch this subject. By collecting data, I seek to understand the context and setting of the participants, interpret the findings, which obviously shaped by my own experiences and backgrounds.

“Scholars working in the area of life history research accept that all social science data are made up of human interpretations and that nearly all such data are reconstructions or representations of past events and experiences. Because of its development of techniques for gathering, coding, and analyzing explicitly reconstructive data, the life history approach is suitable for studying not only the subjective phases of social life but the historical and structural aspects as well”. (<http://what-when-how.com/sociology/life-histories-and-narratives/>) accessed 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2013)

This process of collecting data, the interviews, the narratives and questions are in line with the focus of this paper. As much as considerations have been put to present what came out of the narratives narrated by members of Jehovah's Witness, obviously other issues might have risen in the process that may have been perceived by the narrators as important, yet they fall outside the boundaries of my research question and not everything can be included. With that in mind, it was important to consider this when conducting the interviews, specific approaches and procedures were required in order to have successful interviews as Alessandro Portelli is explaining

“...oral sources are not found, but *co-created* by the historian. They would not exist in this form without the presence, and stimulation, the active role of the historian in the field interview Oral Sources are generated in a dialogic exchange –an interview literally a looking at each other, an exchange of gazes. In this exchange questions and answers do not necessarily go in one direction only”. ([http://www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/expressions\\_portelli.pdf](http://www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/expressions_portelli.pdf) accessed on 23rd February, 2012)

I will describe in detail the findings in themes that have emerged, they have been categorized in types of persecutions that the Jehovah's Witnesses experienced. The persecutions that I

have identified are more physical, the actual actions that were done to Jehovah's Witnesses in Malawi. Inevitably there are spiritual and emotional sufferings that the Jehovah's Witnesses in Malawi went through, however, those types of suffering are not mainly included in my themes, because not only is it sidetracking with this study, but I would never know the extent of emotional impact these persecutions had on Malawian members of Jehovah's Witness., furthermore there was not much time in the field to enable me to look in this area. Hence I concentrated on the physical actions that could be easily narrated. I will present these oral memoirs and reinterpret them as I understand them, and hoping without changing the story. The participants during the interviews were simply conveying the important experiences of their own lives. The goal here is to interpret and reconstruct the life history; the experiences lived through life history, and at the same time reconstructing the life story; the narrated life story. This will be done by classifying the experiences of the members of Jehovah's Witness in themes that have developed out of the narratives narrated.

In presenting these findings I will use the Life History and Narrative Approach. "The discussion of narrative and other speech events at the discourse level rarely allows us to prove anything. It is essentially a hermeneutic study, where continual engagement with the discourse as it was delivered, gains entrance to the perspective of the speaker and audience, tracing the transfer of information and experience in a way that deepens our own understandings of what language and social life are all about".

(<http://www.smkb.ac.il/Eims/data2/2002/10/91153011.pdf> accessed 3rd April, 2013)

I have used this theory to assist me in collecting data and conducting interviews, in order to have stories of their lives told. In addition, it should be remembered that as much as the events and stories are factual, this is not a biography study of the life of an individual(s). Although the stories are experiences of the individuals, I will only use the theory in narrating the stories in a way that they can be understood and this is interpreted according to my understanding to the narrated stories during the interviews. This is not a life history of one individual or biography; the stories are mainly intended to give an account of historical events as they happened to a group of people.

### **3.3 Advocacy and Ecumenical Diakonia**

The second theory that I am going to use is ecumenical diakonia. This theory has continued to develop and expound over time, and deals with arising challenges of today's social issues. Even though the word 'diakonia' is not necessary used in the context of Malawi, I have

chosen to use it because it is helpful in the analysis chapter in finding good answers to the research question, in addition, I chose this theory because of its ecclesial identity, its uniqueness pertaining to Church and its functions, which are in focus of this study and also in order to understand better the diaconal challenges posed in the research question.

The authors of *'Research Methods in the Social Science'* explain this way "Best of all Theories by its very nature can always be modified and extended to fit the situation" (Somekh & Lewin, 2005:49). This is exactly that I will do with this theory of ecumenical diakonia, it will be extended in the Malawi situation with the case of Jehovah's Witnesses and churches in Malawi. This theory will be used in the analysis Chapter. With this theory, I will tackle on the historical past of the churches's response to the situation with the Jehovah's Witnesses in Malawi and again challenge its continual role in current situations in a changing world.

Ecumenical Diakonia affirms the understanding of diakonia as reconciling, compassionate, transformative, justice seeking and prophetic. "...holistic ecumenical diakonia attends to the healing, and reconstructive elements of human life. Here the explicitly spiritual gifts of prayer and consolation are offered along with the social dimensions of healing, reconciliation and rebuilding communities and nations". (Ferguson and Ortega, 2002 p. 3)

Ecumenical diakonia has several dimensions enclosed to it; however, I am not going to use the theory of Ecumenical Diakonia in its full entirety because that would be too much for this Master thesis. However, I will concentrate on; Ecumenical Diakonia as a Prophetic Diakonia furthermore, I will use this study as a way of developing ecumenical diakonia concept in a setting where the concept of diakonia is carried out but the term 'Diakonia' itself is not generally used or known.

- **Ecumenical Diakonia as Prophetic Diakonia**

Ecumenical Diakonia points the usefulness of diakonia because it gives an understanding of a church that relates to its reality, and it lifts up advocacy as an act of the church. In Prophetic Diakonia it is important and the churches ought to side and walk with those who struggle against structural and other forms of injustices. The Church needs to be dynamic in its actions and sensitive to the current and changing social needs and issues that may rise locally or even

beyond because in today's world, there are much closer inter-relationships among different regions, and globally.

“Prophecy is indeed different from diakonia, but diakonia can be prophetic in so far as it is performed in the name of God. When Jesus healed people on the Sabbath, He was acting prophetically. He was acting in the name of God. He was proclaiming through his actions that the human person is more than the law. ‘For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath’ (Matthew 12:8). Thus diakonia, the service of God to our fellow men and women, has as its goal the concrete presence of God. Diakonia is the sign of God with and among us, Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14). And this sign is given through the action of God there, where life is threatened. Amidst this reality, it is necessary to act with words and actions: Enough! Things cannot go on this way! A conversion of value is urgently needed. We have to testify with our actions the same way Jesus Christ: “Do as I did”. (Ferguson, and Ortega p. 14)

Prophetic Diakonia has its insight from the revised meaning of the word ‘diakonia’ as explained by John Collins an Australian theologian “documented that the view that the Greek word does not mean humble service, but rather an important task that is given to somebody by an important authority. In the New Testament, it most often refers to a ministry (leadership role) or, as we have seen related to Jesus, his Messianic mission.” (Diakonia in Context, 2009:81). The Church has the important task, of standing in the gap for those at periphery and being prophetic meaning to defend justice “Diakonal action therefore by its very nature includes the task of unmasking especially systemic forms of injustice and of promoting justice.” (ibid)

“Ecumenical Diakonia as Love of life: the call to participate in God’s Mission leads us to work as co-creators, with the firm conviction that all may have life abundantly (John 10:10). To be true co-creator, participants must resemble the Creator in two important aspects – God’s compassion and God’s self-emptying love (kenosis), represented by the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. All the activities of the Christian community in evangelism, diakonia, the struggle for human dignity, healing, peace and justice belong together in the mission of God”. (Ferguson and Ortega p. 9)

Today the Malawi churches have developed a strong ecumenical tradition; This was more evident at the dawn of democracy, they facilitated an important role of transition from one party to multiparty system. This led to the formation of Public Affairs Committee (PAC). I will give a full description of what PAC is in the next chapter of Context and Background “Prophetic diakonia addresses the root caused of injustice while also addressing human suffering and brokenness, seeking long term and sustainable response to urgent challenges and human needs”. (Ferguson and Ortega p. 1 & 2)

### **3.4 The Freedom of Religion as a Human Right**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 18 declares that; “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”. (Boyle and Sheen, 1997:4). This freedom of religion encompasses all religions, beliefs and freedom, not to believe; including the freedom to practice and share one’s thoughts, and beliefs.

Without recognising that “others” have the same rights to freedom of religion just like “us” can be challenging when it comes to its implementation and practicality. This right has often been misunderstood and people of different religion wanting to have this freedom of religion for themselves and not extending the same right to others of another religion that is different from theirs. The attitude of superiority of a religion over other religions has resulted in violation of freedom of religion as a human right, leading to discrimination and intolerance. It has over the years led to persecution of the minority groups.

This theory will be used to explore how freedom of religion fared in Malawi from time of independent in 1964 to democracy in 1992; the relationship between the government and the religious groups, again relationship between the Jehovah’s Witness and the mainline churches in Malawi

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

#### 4.1 Brief History of Malawi

Malawi is a small country in Africa, located on the Southeast of the Continent; on the eastern and southern side, Malawi shares borders with Mozambique while on the west shares boarder with Zambia, and to the north borders with Tanzania. Malawi has a wide coastal area; twenty percent of its total area of 118,480 square kilometers is Lake Malawi. Malawi received her independent on 6<sup>th</sup> July, 1964 from the British colonialist. After serving as the prime minister, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda became the first president of the Republic of Malawi in 1966 and governed the country for close to thirty years. Not long after independent, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda started implementing polices that granted him absolute power which led him into becoming an autocratic leader.

In early 1970's with subsequently upsurge of power on himself, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda declared himself the life state president of the Republic of Malawi. He had the power to appoint majority of the parliamentarians himself. Earlier in his government, several cabinet ministers protested against some of his policies but never succeeded; three ministers were dismissed and others, in protest resigned from their ministerial positions in the government<sup>4</sup>. After the crisis with the first cabinet, there was nobody who dared to openly stood up against him or criticized Ngwazi (The name he was known by in Malawi). During his dictatorship rule under one party system, there was no freedom of expression, human rights were not observed, and there was infringement towards the right to worship. There was no civil society groups; one that was present during the colonial rule; the African Civil Servants Association died "This body negotiated terms of service. With the coming of independence the organization quietly died. Most civil servants were reluctant to belong to such a body in case they were suspected of engaging in 'all forms of subversion'" (Muluzi, Juwayeyi, Makhambera and Phiri, 1999:97)

In the following three decades he ruled unopposed until in the early 1990's when up-risings against his government started to emerge and there were signs of change coming to Malawi.

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<sup>4</sup> 'Democracy with a price; The History of Malawi since 1900'

It was in 1992 when the Catholic Bishops published a Pastoral Letter<sup>5</sup> and it was this pastoral letter that triggered reaction from the Dr. Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Congress Party, and uprising from people of Malawi against this one party regime. As Kenneth Ross points out in his book ‘The Transformation of power in Malawi, 1992 -95’

“In March 1992 the Catholics Bishops of Malawi issued their pastoral letter ‘Living our faith’. Rarely in modern times has a church document had such immediate explosive effect in the life of nation. Within four days the ruling Malawi Congress Party (MCP) convened in emergency session to pass an unreserved...” (Ross, K 1996:38)

I will come back to the Roman Catholic Bishops Pastoral letter in the analysis chapter.

Gradually things got worse from mid-1960’s to early-1990’s; freedom of expression, observation of human rights, and freedom of association, all these continued to deteriorate and by 1990 everything had reached beyond what people could bear, and people of Malawi felt that enough was enough. From the beginning of his leadership, Dr. Kamuzu Banda ruled with iron fits. Measures were put in place by the Malawi Congress Party (the ruling party) to prevent recurrence of opposition to the government. The most important of these measures was the passing of the 1966 Act of Parliament which made the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) the only party in the country. In addition, the Parliament in 1971 passed a law that made Kamuzu Banda the Life President of the Republic. (Muluzi, Juwayeyi, Makhambera and Phiri,1999:90).

The Malawi Constitution constituted a One-party state, and the MCP became the government of the country not just a party. There was no separation between the Malawi Congress Party and the Malawi government, it was the same thing. The citizens of Malawi automatically became the members of the Malawi Congress Party; it was not by choice, the fact that one was born and a citizen of Malawi, they were considered a member of Malawi Congress Party.

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Living Our Faith’ Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops of Malawi. Lent 1992

<sup>6</sup>“Every citizen of Malawi was deemed a member of MCP. There was no central or regional registry of party membership. Active members were mostly elected during meetings held by the leaders of main committees. Once an individual was elected at these meetings there was no chance of turning down the position... Selling of party cards was basically a fundraising activity of the party. Therefore it was not a requirement to register the recipient (buyers). Each leader was only required to bring money equivalent to the numbers of card he/she was assigned.”

Later the government introduced MCP membership cards, it was required that every citizen of Malawi had to give money when the card was presented to them whenever they did not possess one already. This card had to be carried all the time, everywhere as a proof that one was a law abiding citizen and was committed to MCP and Kamuzu Banda. In some cases especially during emergencies the membership card could be used as an ID for identification. Mothers were also told to buy these membership cards for their babies, in other extreme cases pregnant mothers were forced to buy membership cards for their unborn child. The buying of card was not necessarily to join the party, but to show loyalty to the ruling party of MCP, which every Malawian already belonged to by the virtue of being born a Malawian<sup>7</sup>.

The Malawi Congress Party enforced the law and loyalty of people of Malawi in different ways; the government controlled information and media the only two newspapers that operated in the country published views that were in favor with the government. Ngwazi controlled the economy of the country; most big companies were nationalized, even though Kamuzu boasted of being a capitalist leader. There were lots of political detentions, suppression of associations; voluntary groupings and organizations were considered highly suspicious, just to mention a few. Other organizations initiated and controlled by the government were very influential in the Kamuzu Banda’s government for example; The League of Malawi Youth, the Malawi Young Pioneers and the League of women.

The Youth League substituted the pre-independency movements which many young people in schools belonged to, such as the Boys’ Brigade, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, which Kamuzu Banda took a dislike and eventually they ceased to exist. The Youth League consisted of

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<sup>6</sup> <http://marvinshilmer.blogspot.no/2011/03/malawi-savage-betrayal-by-watchtower.html>

<sup>7</sup> An unpublished article by Boniface Thawapo of Mzuzu Malawi ‘Malawi Congress Party –Structure, membership and party card distribution during the presidency of Kamuzu Banda’ 2010

young men and women with little or no education. They had several duties required of them to perform, but their main aim was to ensure that people followed what was called the four corner stones of the country on which the MCP claimed to have been founded. These four corner stones (*Ngodya zinai*) were; (*Kumvera, Kusunga mwambo, Umodzi ndi Kukhulupilika* (obedience, discipline, loyalty, and unity). Members of the Youth League were regarded as the eyes and ears of the party they were considered spies for the government. The Youth League members were always present at every political functions be it at national level, regional, district and branch levels. They helped in getting people to party meetings and controlled every activity at all political meetings. They would order shops and markets to close whenever the president was holding a rally in the locale or simply passing by, they assisted the police in tracking law-breakers, and they sold MCP cards at all public places. It came to a point that some people, who did not have an MCP membership card, or did not have money to buy one, were denied services such as treatment at clinic, boarding into public busses and passage into markets. ((Muluzi, Juwayeyi, Makhambera, and Phiri 1999)

Another body that was important to the Malawi government was The League of Malawi Women. These women were a driving force in the MCP mass movement. They popularized Kamuzu's name through patriotic songs, traditional dances and were wearing special designed cloth imprinted with Kamuzu Banda's face. They were known as 'Kamuzu's Mbumba' and Kamuzu was '*Nkhoswe ya amayi onse M'malawi*' (an advocate for all women in Malawi). Other women voluntarily joined the dancing groups, which entertained Ngwazi, but others were forced to join the dancing group especially those in civil services. The leaders of the Women's League received incentives from Kamuzu he built modern houses for them, sent some of them on tours abroad and they had the monopoly of distributing and selling of Chibuku - the local millet alcoholic drink. (ibid: 96)

Another strong wing of Malawi Congress Party was; The Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP). The MYP members consisted of people with some education and were trained by the Israelis (ibid: 93). The MYP was formed to engage its members in commercial agriculture. It established training bases throughout the country, where besides agriculture the MYP acquired technical skills in motor-vehicle mechanics, carpentry, office skills and other areas. Upon the completion of their training they joined agricultural settlement schemes or trade schools, or simply returned to their villages where they were expected to be leading in the

implementation of modern agricultural practices. In addition to the Malawi Defense Force, the Malawi Young Pioneers were also involved in military activities and they were armed. (Muluzi, Juwayeyi, Makhambera, Phiri, 1999:93)

“The MYP had security branch, which made the organization an object of fear. Every member of the MYP swore allegiance to President Kamuzu Banda personally in a manner reminiscent of Hitler’s Storm Troopers. Under the laws of Malawi the MYP had the same powers in Matters of security as regular policeman. No policeman could arrest a member of the MYP without prior consultation with the officer-in-charge of the MYP. No police officer could release someone arrested by an MYP before consultation with his or her commanding officer... They felt they were more valuable to Kamuzu Banda than the police and army were. Many of the atrocities linked with the MCP regime were perpetrated by the MYP security wing.” (Muluzi, Juwayeyi, Makhambera, and Phiri, 1999:95)

Thus, here we get to appreciate what kind of government system that was put in place by Kamuzu Banda; he had all strategies well positioned to make sure that his government went on un-opposed. There was fear among Malawians to speak out against his governing style because there was a deep intolerant of dissent. The Jehovah’s Witnesses refused to buy MCP membership cards and were considered disloyal to the government; it was reckoned as openly dishonoring Kamuzu Banda. The reason that the members of Jehovah’s Witness refused to buy or own the MCP membership cards was that; according to the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society’s rule it was against their belief and disloyalty to God if they had accepted to buy the MCP card<sup>8</sup>. Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society taught them that they could only give their allegiance to Jehovah God and his kingdom.

What followed was persecution as the consequences for their refusal to buy the MCP membership cards. Later on, they were barred from congregating as a group and it became illegal for them to organize any kind of meetings or gatherings. Without this card, it was difficult to access essential services. Despite all the persecution, some members of Jehovah’s Witnesses continued to meet in secrete, but great caution had to be taken to avoid being caught. Their publications and any other materials related to the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society became illegal documents.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://marvinshilmer.blogspot.no/2011/03/malawi-savage-betrayal-by-watchtower.html>

In the long run, many JW members left their belief and joined other mainline churches, and those who continued to congregate, did so in secrete. In 1967s Jehovah's Witness were officially banned and the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society were declared an illegal institution in Malawi and were considered a 'danger sect' as reported in the newspapers then.

The Times, October 23, 1967, under large bold-faced headlines: "MALAWI BANS 'DANGER SECT.'" It went on to say:<sup>9</sup>

"The Jehovah's Witnesses religious organization has been declared 'dangerous to the good government of Malawi' and is therefore now an unlawful society. This announcement is made in a special Government Gazette Supplement published at the weekend. The notice No. 235, is signed personally by the President Dr. Banda, and declares that the action is taken under Section 70 (2) (ii) of the Malawi Penal Code. The effect of the announcement is that the Jehovah's Witnesses may no longer hold meetings, sell or distribute literature or collect money . . . The law affecting unlawful societies states that anyone who manages or assists in the management of an unlawful society is guilty of an offense and is liable to imprisonment for 14 years. Other sections of the law state that no member may allow a meeting of the society or of members of the society to be held in 'any house, building or place' belonging to him or occupied by him. The penalty here is a jail term for seven years. The Penal Code also provides for the search by police of any premises belonging or occupied by the society or its members. No member may display signs or 'shout or utter any slogan or make any sign' associated with the society. The law also provides for the appointment of an officer to wind up the affairs of an unlawful society." ([http://www.jwfiles.com/wt\\_control/malawi.htm](http://www.jwfiles.com/wt_control/malawi.htm) accessed on 14 February, 2013)

The Kamuzu regime used all means they could to control and sustain power, starting from security, economy, and introduced Traditional Courts who had the power to try murder and treason cases. The problem was that most of the Tradition Courts were headed by laymen who had no education in law or any legal experience<sup>10</sup> but they were devotedly loyal to Dr. Kamuzu Banda. In addition to that, The Malawi Broadcasting Station (MBC) the only existing radio station at the time was monopolized and extremely controlled by the MCP. Furthermore, there were many detentions of innocent people, the political detainees spend years in prison without trial and their prison conditions were inhumane.

"The prison conditions suffered by detainees or those serving sentences for political crimes are generally extremely poor. On occasions political prisoners have been held

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<sup>9</sup> A Watchtower article that appeared in 1968 about the Jehovah's Witnesses in Malawi and the persecution inflicted upon them.

<sup>10</sup> Most of the traditional courts fall under the Traditional Authorities and chiefs

in leg-irons or chained to iron bars for long periods. Prisoners have died in detention, either from the generally poor conditions or as a result of torture, but there has been no investigation of any deaths. Africa watch has gathered testimony of torture, usually severe beatings of political prisoners, but it is clear that the worst ill-treatment is reserved for criminal prisoners. Repeat criminal offenders are subjected to “hard-core program” at Nsanje or Dzeleka prisons. They are stripped naked, chained to the floor of their cells and either denied food or given one-quarter rations. Many are reported to have died as a result”. (Africa Watch Report, 1990:3).

## **4.2 Christianity in Malawi**

Christianity in Malawi has a fairly long history of existence dating back to 1800’s when the first missionaries started to arrive; this was before the colonization of the country. One of the early missionaries to Malawi was Dr. David Livingstone, who is considered to be the one man who brought Christianity to Malawi. “Livingstone was a Scottish missionary and one of the greatest European explorers of Africa, whose opening up the interior of the continent contributed to the ‘Scramble for Africa’”. ([http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/livingstone\\_david.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/livingstone_david.shtml) accessed 15 April, 2013)

When Malawi was colonized, undeniably there were people who were not happy with the British rule and displayed resistance towards the colonial government. We see that the early freedom fighters against colonialism, those who fought for the struggle for justice and self-rule were people who were Christians and later became leaders in different churches after being trained by missionaries. One prominent figure in Malawi is John Chilembwe who is celebrated as a hero of Malawi; he is remembered as a martyr in the freedom fighting against the colonial rule. John Chilembwe was born in about 1871 (the date is approximately) he met a missionary by the name of Joseph Booth who later travelled with him to America where he did his education and was awarded Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Divinity degrees (Phiri:1999:12)

By 1900 he returned back home in Malawi, then called Nyasaland where he became a preacher and one of the freedom fighters for Nyasaland against the white rule. He struggled for the freedom and justice of Malawian people. “Chilembwe was also an educator, spiritual leader and even a pan-Africanist of sorts; he deeply cherished ideas such as self-reliance,

emancipation and co-operation between the struggling, black populations of both Africa and America” (Phiri, 1999: ix).

In addition to preaching the gospel, Christian missionaries operated other services which include education and health institutions; they opened up schools and hospitals. Today local churches have continued to provide education and health services which complement government’s development efforts in the country.

The large percentage of Malawians define themselves as Christians; according to national statistics 2008 82.7% of Malawians are Christians, 13.0 Muslims, 1.9 Other religions and 2.5 have no religion at all. Accessed on 15 May, 2013

[http://www.nsomalawi.mw/images/stories/data\\_on\\_line/demography/census\\_2008/Main%20Report/Census%20Main%20Report.pdf](http://www.nsomalawi.mw/images/stories/data_on_line/demography/census_2008/Main%20Report/Census%20Main%20Report.pdf)). Christians are composed of the Roman Catholics and Protestants, the Presbyterians mainly The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) make up the largest group of protestants, other denominations include; Anglicans, Baptist, Evangelicals and Seventh Day Adventist etc. These different denominations are organized separately in their own denominations, and have different structures. However, they have Ecumenical forums where most of these denominations do meet and interact. The Jehovah’s Witnesses are not part of any of the Ecumenical structures. So I can say that the church has been around for longtime and has seen all major political changes that Malawi has gone through starting from pre-colonization to independent and later to democratic government which was achieved in 1994.

#### **4.3 The Development and Growth of Jehovah’s Witness in Malawi**

The Jehovah’s Witness belief was first introduced in Malawi early in the 1900’s by the man named Elliot Kamwana who led one of the earliest organised resistances to the policies of the colonial government and missionaries, which looked down upon the Africans. Later, Kamwana withdrew from education in protest against the introduction of fees and travelled to neighbouring countries of Zimbabwe and South Africa.

People “were unhappy, for instance, with the Livingstonia Mission policy that required lengthy apprenticeship before one could be baptised and become a full member of the church. People went through various grades of catechumen before they could be considered for the status of a full church member. This created a long

waiting list of would-be full church members. Further, the missionaries were unwilling to promote Africans to positions of authority in the Church. They were simply not ready to share the same status with Africans”. (Muluzi B, Juwayeyi Y.M., Makhambera M, Phiri D.D., 1999 p. 8-9)

While in Cape Town, South Africa, Kamwana met <sup>11</sup>Joseph Booth an Englishman who had also lived in Malawi earlier as a missionary but later Booth was expelled. Booth had somewhat a different tone in his speech, he sided with the Africans. The author of ‘Let us die for Africa’ had this to say about Joseph Booth “He used to eat with black men together to show that he was a real friend, and even went to the length of telling his fellow missionaries in his mission station at Mitsidi not to treat the African badly, but to be equal and have meals together. Some of his words we used to hear him speak were ‘Rise up and be blessed, and save your country’”. (Phiri 1999:3). No wonder he never agreed with the fellow missionaries in his approach of things, because the other missionaries treated black people with no respect.

“Booth was radical, evangelical and egalitarian in his approach. He was of very unpredictable behaviour. By 1895, he quarrelled and fallen out with the ZIM at Mitsidi, the Nyasa Industrial Mission at Likhubula and the Baptist Industrial Mission at Gowa in Ntcheu. He also founded the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Mission at Malamulo and deserted it; he promoted a scheme called the African Christian Union..... “The Union appealed to Africans to unite and to work for their own religious, political, economic and spiritual redemption. The planters, the Government and the missionaries, however, became very uncomfortable with Booth’s teaching”. (Muluzi, Juwayeyi, Makhambera, Phiri : 1999:8)

Later on, while in South Africa, Booth got associated with the Jehovah’s Witnesses and it was during this time that he introduced Elliot Kamwana to the teachings of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah’s Witness) and upon returning home to Nyasaland (Malawi) Kamwana begun public speaking and preaching basing his message on the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. He spoke against the rule of colonialism, and freedom of Africa. Kamwana and his peers were unhappy with the missionaries’ selective treatment of other African, which brought divisions and tensions among villagers. “They favoured some and ignored others” (Muluzi, Juwayeyi, Makhambera, and Phiri, 1999:9). Also the local people

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<sup>11</sup> This is the same Joseph Booth who went to America with the Malawian Martyr John Chilembwe

were “unhappy for instance, with the Livingstonia Mission Policy that required lengthy apprenticeship before one could be baptised and become a full member of the church”. (ibid: 1999:8). Elliot Kamwana in line with the teaching of the Jehovah’s Witnesses predicted the coming of a new age in 1914 as the year when this world would end and in which Jesus Christ would come again. In the new coming era, oppressing powers would cease and there would be no tax collectors (The British), the new age would usher in an African state, this was received well by the masses that were eager to have an end to the colonial rule.

Most of his converts were from the Livingstonia Mission where they had a long waiting list of Africans who were trained church leaders but were not ordained for many years and many people were not yet recognised as full members. When Elliot Kamwana came back to Malawi his preaching was very radical and appealing to people especially those that were ignored for a long time by the Livingstonia missionaries. He interpreted the new age as the time when the oppressors would cease, and there will be an African state controlled by Africans. Kamwana did not only refer to the colonial government but also to the missionaries who worked hand in hand with the government and often the indigenous people looked at the government officials and the missionaries as one who both wanted to protect their own interest. The other fact was that, in addition to bringing Christianity to Africa; missionaries also paved way for the establishment of colonial administrative government for trade and commerce. “Missionaries were important to colonial authorities because they established and founded schools. This is one of the reasons the colonial administrators had a keen sense of obligation towards missionaries”. (Sindima, 1998:2)

When Elliot Kamwana came to Malawi and started preaching differently he won the masses “In less than two years he gained over 10, 000 converts, most of them from Livingstonia’s long waiting list”. (Muluzi, Juwayeyi, Makhambera, Phiri, 1999:10)

Later on both Joseph Booth and Elliot Kamwana fell from grace with the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society “Joseph Booth had become known as what a writer later described as “religious hitchhiker,” using one denomination of Christendom after another in order to pursue his own aims” (Year Book of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, 1999). “Kamwana was strong and persuasive... through his sermons he preached against the injustices with zeal. He strongly and openly attacked the policies of the government and missionaries... He was

arrested and deported to Mauritius and the Seychelles.” (Muluzi, Juwayeyi, Makhambera, Phiri,1999:10).

#### **4.4 The Watch Tower Movements in Malawi**

After Kamwana was deported, he had already attracted many followers and had many followers who continued to preach in imitation of his charismatic style. Elliot Kamwana’s preaching is described as “wildfire catching the grass.” The effects of Kamwana’s preaching, with his dramatic open-air baptisms, did indeed spread rapidly, like a bushfire, through Malawi. Thousands responded, and many congregations were soon established”. (Year Book of the Jehovah’s Witness, 1999:52). However, Kamwana became separated with the Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society, because of his interest in political sphere. So was Joseph Booth, he too was separated from the Jehovah’s Witnesses. In the 1999 year book of the Jehovah’s Witness Kamwana’s preaching has been described as;

“Politically motivated. It was not long before the dubious preaching methods of Elliott Kamwana were attracting the unfavorable attention of government authorities in Malawi. He was soon deported to the Seychelles. By 1910, Joseph Booth had also moved on and was finished as far as the Watch Tower Society was concerned”. (Year Book of the Jehovah’s Witness, 1999:151)

Following the tumble with Elliot Kamwana and Joseph Booth some years passed without the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society making any contact with the Jehovah’s Witness members in Malawi. Later on in 1925 (ibid) the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society sent John Hudson to spend 15 months in Malawi to keep the link between the Society and the Jehovah’s Witnesses in Malawi. John Hudson met with the Malawian members of Jehovah’s Witness, but not everyone was happy with his coming and others were not in agreement with this new leader sent to them by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. The reaction of those who opposed their newly sent leader is reported to be resilient. “We shall not get our teaching from men in Cape Town,” they said. “We shall do what we think is right” (Yearbook of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, 1999:154).

It appears these people held close to the teachings they first heard from Elliot Kamwana in earlier years, and did not appreciate the coming of John Hudson who wanted them to follow

the direction of the society, which meant they had to be under some leadership in South Africa where the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society had set a branch to oversee the activities of Jehovah's Witness in Malawi. When Hudson came, he advised the members of Jehovah's Witnesses to temporarily stop preaching in the manner that they were preaching and wait for the instructions from the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. The idea of stopping to preach temporarily did not please some members, and decided they will continue to preach, consequently the division sprang out among the Jehovah's Witnesses in Malawi, and some members of Jehovah' Witness became detached from the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society and they set their own 'Watch Towers' congregations.

The name Watch Tower became the name of the new congregations that decided to separate from the main Jehovah's Witness and locally became to be known as '*Wachitawara*'. There was the main group of Jehovah's Witnesses that kept the link and continued to receive their instructions from the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society in Cape Town, South Africa, and then there was another group which became independent, but still adopted the name Watch Tower thus, the division of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Malawi came about. Although the *Wachitawara* started their own congregations separate from the Jehovah's Witnesses, they maintained some of the Jehovah's Witness' teachings, and sometimes used the materials of the Jehovah's Witness. (Year Book of the Jehovah's Witnesses, 1999:154). The new branch of the Jehovah's Witness became another movement on its own and never died up-to date. I had an opportunity of interviewing some members who belong to this branch of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

All members who belonged to both groups, the Jehovah's Witness and *Wachitawara* became victims of religious persecution under Dr. Kamuzu Banda, for the same reason that both groups refused to purchase and own MCP membership card, which the government required of every citizen of Malawi. Although in the course of writing this paper, I have come to find out that both sides do emphasize on their being different, and that there is no any current connection in relation to each other, they are often grouped as the same by the society. When persecutions begun both groups experienced the same difficulties from the government.

This study is not going to focus much on the differences of these two groups, rather it is going to give much attention into their common ground, which is that they both experienced the religious persecution, due to their refusal to purchase MCP membership cards under the leadership of Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda. The government of Malawi was not concerned with the differences, the fact was that all were considered defiant and disloyal to his leadership by refusing to purchase the required membership card, they were persecuted. It is against that background that in this paper I will not refer to them as separate groups. For the sake of this study, the terms 'Jehovah's Witnesses' refers to both the Jehovah's Witnesses and the members of *Wachitawara*.

Mainline churches in Malawi consider the Jehovah's Witness as a sect of Christianity. Christian sects are those whose belief in what is considered essential biblical doctrines are different. For example, on the question of the Person of Jesus Christ they say "He was a spirit person, just as "God is a Spirit"; he was a mighty one, although not Almighty as Jehovah God is; also he was before all others of God's creatures, for he was the first son that Jehovah God brought forth. Hence he is called "the only begotten Son" of God, for God has no partner in bringing forth his first-begotten Son." Here the Jehovah's Witness reject Jesus Christ as equal to God. Another doctrine that is seen as an error is the conditions for salvation; the Jehovah's Witnesses believe that "All who by reason of faith in Jehovah God and in Christ Jesus dedicate themselves to do God's will and then faithfully carry out their dedication will be rewarded with everlasting life." Here there's work attached to salvation. (<http://www.xenos.org/classes/papers/sects.htm> Accessed 10th April, 2013). The two are just some of the examples of why the Jehovah's Witnesses are defined as a sect of Christianity, their belief and doctrine is a source of controversy and divergences. However, my focus here will be on the social issues and their suffering as victims of religious persecution.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### PERSECUTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF MEMBERS OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS IN MALAWI

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will present the findings of the research work for this thesis. These are the experiences of JW members in Malawi; they are people from below and not the structure of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, because that is not the focus of this study. In this chapter I will refer to both primary and secondary sources. By primary sources I mean the data collected during field work and the secondary sources are the written sources. Through this findings presentation, I will be answering the first two objectives that were introduced earlier in introductory chapter of the study; which are; to give a description and to record the historical realities experienced by the victims of religious persecution in Malawi by the members of Jehovah's Witnesses between 1960 and 1990. Secondly, to explore the role that Church played in enhancing or subsiding the religious freedom and human rights in Malawi between 1960 and 1990 in connection with the Jehovah's Witness situation. The role that the churches played is going to be presented.

Here we shall see the level of persecution that members of Jehovah's Witness experienced. Other experiences were common to all members of JW, and still some persecutions were specific to individuals. There were those persecutions that were formal and organized by the government authorities, whereby the government gave direct orders on what should happen to the members of Jehovah's Witnesses in the country. On the other hand, there were particular persecutions, which were unique to individuals, where people in the community just took an advantage of the situation and they inflicted pain on members of Jehovah's Witness.

The experiences have been categorized into themes, which I found relevant for the thesis. Many experiences were narrated by members of Jehovah's Witnesses during the interviews, and for the sake of clarity and easy understanding, I have grouped the experiences depending on the actual kind of pain infliction that was done. These experiences of persecutions include; loosing of property, arrests and beatings, in some extent the loss of lives, being forced out of the country to exile, and again the findings contain the general response by the Church in Malawi to the persecutions. I will include the response and reaction of the Watch Tower

Society and Bible Tract Headquarters /leadership towards persecutions of their members in Malawi. The main reason that triggered persecution of members of Jehovah's Witness was their refusal to by party cards, which brings me to second point.

## **5.2 Refusal to purchase the Malawi Congress party Cards as key reason for persecutions**

As already mentioned above, the Jehovah's Witness in Malawi refused to buy or own membership cards, which was required by law for every Malawian to have. Their refusal was accorded to the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society rule, which according to them a member of Jehovah's Witness can only belong to Jehovah and it is sin to pledge loyalty to anyone else. In this case owning and purchasing a membership card that was required by law was considered sin by members of Jehovah's Witness because that was pledging allegiance to the political party and not God. As a result of their refusal, many of them were ill-treated in different ways and others were killed, because they were considered defiant against the government.

Even though refusing to buy party cards became the main reason why the Jehovah's Witness started facing persecutions from the government officials and the ruling MCP, it has to be noted that this was not the first time that the Jehovah's Witnesses had found themselves in problems with the government. The interviews conducted showed that the Jehovah's Witness had had earlier differences with the government authorities even before independent. At one point, the colonial government demanded that people should give money to the government to assist in the second world war in which the British fought; members of Jehovah's Witnesses refused to support war and did not give out the demanded money; one male interviewee said the following "The government commanded that people should pay one Shilling to help in the war, but us as Watchtower members refused to give money for the war, because they do not support war". To them giving the money for the purpose of war, was like taking part in the war which they believed it was wrong.

There were several things that the colonial government commanded people to do but they were met with resistance from the group of Jehovah's Witnesses. Another incident that repeatedly came out from different participants was the issue of what they call box ridges.

People were demanded to cultivate their fields in a particular way by making box ridges; this too, did not please the members of Jehovah's Witness because according to them it was too much work and many people struggled to make box ridges in their own fields. "They were arresting people and using force to command us to cultivate our fields by making box ridges, we wanted to side with the weak of the society who were not strong enough to do that". (Male interviewee, in Blantyre). The Jehovah's Witnesses also refused to take part in voting.

"Early in the 1960's the spirit of nationalism was running high in Malawi. In harmony with an agreement made with Britain, full self-rule was to be granted in mid-1964 after a general election. In the meantime, Dr. Banda was installed as an internal prime minister for the colony. Before the general election, the government arranged for a voluntary registration of voters to take place from December 30, 1963 to January 19, 1964.... However, because Jesus Christ said that his followers would be "no part of the world," Jehovah's Witnesses also maintain a position of strict neutrality as to the wars of the nations and their political affairs... As the fever of voter registration gripped the country, the Witnesses exercised their right not to register. When party officials noticed their neutral stand, however, violent persecution broke out. Efforts were made to force the Witnesses to change their minds and buy party membership cards". (1999 Yearbook, 1999:171)

After president Kamuzu Banda came to power, the Jehovah's Witness continued to have differences with the government. As already mentioned earlier; the introduction of Malawi Congress Party cards emerged as the main reason that triggered persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society did not allow their members in Malawi to buy these cards; for them purchasing the card meant they were joining the earthly rule and not that of God. When I asked one participants why she refused to buy the membership cards she replied <sup>12</sup>"The elders of our church refused, that we should not buy membership cards because they bring confusion". Jehovah's Witnesses in Malawi were made to believe that buying and owning the membership card was disobedient to their faith and to God. As another woman commented at the time when her father was questioned why they refused to buy party cards.

<sup>13</sup>"What we know is that our church does not allow us to purchase membership cards, and my father said our church does not allow us to do that"

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<sup>12</sup> A woman from the focus group discussion in Ntcheu

<sup>13</sup> A woman from the focus group discussion in Ntcheu

A Jehovah's Witness member could not own a party card, the following article was written in the 'Awake Magazine' of the Watch Tower Society and Bible Tract: <sup>14</sup>

“It is because Jehovah's Witnesses refuse to buy the Malawi Congress Party card. This card declares the holder to be a member of the ruling political party of Malawi. But for Jehovah's Witnesses to buy a political card and thus join a political party would be an open denial of what they believe and stand for.” Awake 1976 Aug 8 p.5

It was because of this reason that the Jehovah's Witness were considered disloyal to the ruling party of MCP and the government of Malawi.

### **5.3 Loosing of property and crops**

As a result of refusing to purchase the membership cards, persecutions begun and there was no regard for human rights of any kind. Many members of Jehovah's Witnesses lost their properties in the process. Many people in Malawi live on subsistence farming, and that was true then just as it is today. Most of these JW members were farmers and their crops mainly maize was slashed from the field and destroyed. This meant everything they depended on was lost; most of them as subsistence farmers, relied on farming for their daily living, in a country where growing season is once per year, it meant many of the JW members were left without food for the entire year and they were going to struggle to find food for themselves and their families.

<sup>15</sup>“Because Emmas and I refused to do so, members of the Youth League destroyed our field of maize, our main food supply for the coming year. While Youth League members chopped down the maize, they were singing ‘Of all who refuse to buy Kamuzu's card, termites will eat their green maize and these people will cry for it’”.

Not only did they lose their source of food, others had their houses burnt as well, leaving them homeless and nothing was left.

<sup>16</sup>“When they came they took fire and burnt our house, I hid my parents because they had said that they would come back and kill them, I told them to go to the mountain in Mozambique so when the house was burnt they were not around because they had promised that they will come on a such day. Everything my parents owned got burnt, the doors, we had a sewing machine, beds, mattresses, chairs everything got burnt. Afterwards they left and later on came back they wanted to take goats, we had 13

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/malawi-mexico-oath-allegiance.php>

<sup>15</sup> An unpublished article of the life story of Enelesi Mzanga

<sup>16</sup> A Woman from the focus group discussion whose parents were among those persecuted

goats and they said they would take 7 goats and share among themselves because my parents refused to purchase the membership cards”.

As these events of late 1960’s unfolded the Watch Tower Society and Bible Tract took note of what was happening, the stories appeared in some of their edition of the ‘Awake’ magazine. Again later it was published in their 1999 year book as follows<sup>17</sup>

“At Lilongwe in central Malawi, 170 homes of these Christians were burned down in three nights. In the Fort Johnston district, slightly to the south, 34 homes and 18 food storage places were burned down toward the end of October. At Mbalame on October 27 the Christians of two congregations all had their homes burned down while they, including the women, were stripped of their clothes and brutally beaten ... Since this is the way the witnesses of Jehovah conduct themselves, why, then, all this violent persecution of them in Malawi? One of the main reasons is that the Witnesses refuse to buy membership cards in Malawi’s Congress Party as well as refuse to buy and wear badges with the picture of the President of Malawi, Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda. Other religious organizations, Catholic, Protestant and Moslem, have all yielded to pressure in these respects, but Jehovah’s witnesses have not. Why? Because of their strictly adhering to the Word of God.” (*Watchtower* 1968 Feb 1 p.71)  
“It is because Jehovah’s Witnesses refuse to buy the Malawi Congress Party card. This card declares the holder to be a member of the ruling political party of Malawi. But for Jehovah’s Witnesses to buy a political card and thus join a political party would be an open denial of what they believe and stand for.” (*Awake* 1976 Aug 8 p.5)

#### **5.4 Discrimination**

The Jehovah’s Witnesses were seen as enemies of Dr. Kamuzu Banda, and the government made sure that their congregations were abolished. The government did everything in its power to punish them in different ways, the 1999 Yearbook of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, mentions how members of the Jehovah’s Witness in Malawi were expelled from their work and persecutions continued to 1970’s.

“In 1972 during the annual convention of the Malawi Congress Party, some disturbing resolutions were adopted. One of these resolutions called for all of Jehovah’s Witnesses to be dismissed from their places of employment. Ruthlessly, without exemption, this was carried. Firms that wanted to retain trusted Witness employees were seized and their assets confiscated”

The decree that the government approved activated a new wave of forceful persecution, all of Jehovah’s Witnesses were to be dismissed from their places of employment and that all of

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/malawi-mexico-oath-allegiance.php>

them living in villages were to be chased away from their homes. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses were discriminated against in their own villages, and communities.

“Another one of the resolution adopted at the convention stated that ‘all Jehovah’s Witnesses who live in the villages should be chased away from there.’ This effectively called for Jehovah’s Witnesses to be cast out of human society! Thousands of their homes were burned or pulled down. Their crops and animals destroyed. They were forbidden to draw water from the village wells. They lost literally everything they owned in looting sprees all over the country” (1999 Yearbook, 1999:188)

People did not want to be associated with ‘Kamuzu’s enemies’ because just by mere friendship with them, it would bring suspicion on you that you are agreeing with those considered treasonous. A member of Jehovah’s Witnesses tells her story

<sup>18</sup>“When our parents heard that we were associating with Jehovah’s Witnesses, they severely opposed us. My family wrote us a letter telling us not to visit them anymore. Their reaction saddened us, but we trusted in Jesus’ promise that we would have many spiritual brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers”

There was a far reaching impact in their personal lives, the discrimination alienated members of JW from their families, friends, and colleagues. The place they once called home, turned up against them, they were no longer welcome in their own villages, not to mention the emotional trauma that they went through along with the physical suffering. Some of their experiences and memories will go on untold.

## **5.5 Arrests, beatings and death**

Many of the Jehovah’s Witnesses were arrested and beaten on several accounts; the women on the focus group discussion mentioned their experiences as well. “We were all beaten, they used big stick, my legs do not function properly today since I got those beatings” “Many of the old members of our church are dead, because they never had a good health from the repeatedly beatings” One older woman narrated of how her husband was once beaten to nearly death.

“My husband was beaten to unconsciousness, later on when he woke up we put him in the house and they came back because they wanted to completely kill him, but we told them he had gone to Balaka where he came from, this was painful and I will never forget”

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<sup>18</sup> An unpublished article of a life story of Enelesi Mzanga

The Malawi government used the Youth League as one of its main instrument to inflict pain and injustices to the members of Jehovah's Witnesses, most of these atrocities were committed by this group. Members of the Youth League were young men and women who were present almost everywhere throughout the country and they always wore a uniform. They were the same people that were selling MCP membership cards; they could arrest people and hand them over to police. The Youth League members were discipline enforcers; they had authority to beat anyone they suspected to be disloyal to the government and Kamuzu Banda without facing any charges.

Members of the youth league were in fore-front when it came to torturing people in the communities, they were feared by many and no one dared to oppose them. Youth League members went around burning houses and destroying properties of the members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

<sup>19</sup>“In September 1967 a campaign to round up all Jehovah's Witnesses swept across the country. To find us, ruthless and predatory young men – members of the Youth League and Malawi Young Pioneers, armed with machetes- searched for Witnesses from door to door. When they found them, the men offered to sell them political party cards”.

At the pick of persecution, even other people who were not necessarily members of the Youth League took part in violence against the members of Jehovah's Witness, especially at the time when the government commanded that those belonging to Jehovah's Witness be removed from their villages and communities.

<sup>20</sup>Several participants in the focus group discussion narrated their stories form memory of how they, together with their families were treated by the Malawi Congress Party and the government.

“I remember in 1964 that my father was beaten almost everywhere in his body except from his head. He sustained so many injuries and his whole body was swollen. We took care of him until he started getting better. Most of the members belong to Jehovah's Witness have died as a result of those constant beatings, their bodies were never well enough and their health deteriorated”.

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<sup>19</sup> An unpublished article of a life story of Enelesi Mzanga

<sup>20</sup> Participants from the focus group discussion in Ntcheu

“I will always remember when my husband was beaten almost left dead. The whole body was swollen, I used to carry him and he could not go to the toilet alone. He needed help in everything”

More articles that were written in the Awake magazine of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract society concerning the situation of members of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Malawi. <sup>21</sup>

“For some of our dear sisters, the persecution was especially harrowing. Many were the reports of rape, mutilation, and beating of Christian women. The sadistic attackers spared nobody. The elderly, the young, and even some pregnant sisters were put through such cruel ordeals. Some suffered miscarriages as a result. Once again, thousands were forced to flee their villages. Many found refuge in the bush. Others went into temporary exile in neighboring Mozambique. By the end of November 1967, the brutal wave of attacks on Jehovah’s Witnesses had claimed at least five more lives. ... The vicious attacks claimed many lives. In Cape Maclear, at the southern end of Lake Malawi, bundles of grass were tied around Zelphat Mbaiko. Petrol was poured on the grass and set alight. He was literally burned to death! Sisters also suffered terribly. Following their refusal to buy party cards, many were repeatedly raped by party officials. In Lilongwe, Sister Magola, along with many others, tried to flee the trouble. However, she was pregnant and could not run very fast. A mob, acting like a pack of wild dogs, caught up with her and beat her to death. At the campus of Bunda College of Agriculture, just outside of Lilongwe, six brothers and one sister were murdered and their bodies were horribly mutilated.” (*Yearbook* 1999, 1999:182,189)

The Watch Tower Bible and Society Tract followed what was going on recorded different events of the persecution of their members in Malawi.

“During this period reports were received at the branch office, showing that more than 100 Kingdom Halls and well over 1,000 homes of our brothers had been burned or torn down. Hundreds of fields and food stores were torched. Sadly, as a result, many families of Jehovah’s Witnesses now found themselves without food or shelter. Some fled for their lives into neighboring Mozambique. Many suffered severe beatings. Among these was Kenneth Chimbaza, a traveling overseer. Not many years after experiencing such mistreatment, he died, evidently as a result of injuries that he had sustained”. (1999 Yearbook, 1999:172)

## 5.6 The Exile

With so much suffering going on; homes lost, crops destroyed , friends and families lost and no hope of changing circumstances any time sooner, it was time for members of Jehovah’s Witness to seek refugee elsewhere. When persecutions intensified, Jehovah’s Witnesses fled

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/malawi-mexico-oath-allegiance.php>

the country to neighboring countries of Zambia and Mozambique. Most of these people died in the bushes where they had to hide from the angry people in their communities. When they first fled to Mozambique in early 1970's, the country of Mozambique was still under the Portuguese rule. But later on in 1975 things changed when the Portuguese handed over power to the people of Mozambique; the refugee camp was dispersed due to the war that broke out following independent and Mozambique was no longer stable. The Malawian members of Jehovah's Witness who were staying in refugee camps were commanded to return home. One elderly man narrated his ordeal.

<sup>22</sup>“At first in 1972 we fled to Mozambique and three years later in 1975 we came back home, the same year 1975, I was severely beaten up and up until now I lost my sight on my right eye, I then fled to Zambia where I stayed for over 20years and came back in 1996”

The events of people fleeing Malawi were also later recorded in the Year Book of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

“With genocide looming on the horizon, a mass exodus of Jehovah's Witness began in October 1972. Thousands fled west into Zambia. At the border, a United Nations observer confirmed that ‘many of the refugees bore cuts and gashes apparently inflicted by pangas... The witnesses were placed in refugee camps at Sinda Misale, located in triangle of land where the borders of Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia converge. However disease spread rapidly because of unsanitary conditions. In a short time, over 350 persons, many of the children, had died”. (*Yearbook* 1999, 1999:189, 190)

Participants mentioned of how the situation could no longer permit them to continue staying in Malawi. They narrated how they escaped Malawi to either Mozambique or Zambia for safety for fear of being killed in their own country.

“Our daughter Dinesi and her husband had a five-ton truck. They employed a driver who was once a Malawi Young Pioneer but who had become sympathetic to our situation. He volunteered to help us and other Witnesses. For several evenings the driver picked up Witnesses from prearranged hiding places. Then he donned his Malawi Young Pioneer uniform and drove the loaded truck through several police roadblocks. He risked much to help hundreds of Witnesses to cross the border into Zambia”.

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<sup>22</sup> This man was interviewed in Lilongwe, he had been in exile and later after democracy came back to Malawi

<sup>23</sup>“When going to Mozambique, we went on foot and we all met at one place and we stayed there without problems with the Portuguese who were ruling the country, but later we came back. When going to Zambia, I was lucky because I was a retired policeman and had bought cattle before I left for Mozambique, and then my brother sold one cow and gave me money that I used for bus fare to flee to Zambia”

Other Malawian refugees stayed in Zambia until democracy was gained in 1994. However, there were groups of other people who were forcefully repatriated to Malawi at the time of persecution. Upon arriving in Malawi, they lived in hiding for many years for fear of being recognized, they disguised their identity and did not return to their former homes; they chose to live in other areas not their villages or communities where people could not identify them easily. A woman in Lilongwe explains her ordeal upon rounded up together with other members Jehovah’s Witnesses by Zambian soldiers and against their will were sent back to Malawi.

“Back in Malawi once more, we did not know where to go. We learned that at political rallies and in the newspapers, people had been warned to watch out for ‘new faces’ arriving in their villages, referring to a Jehovah’s Witnesses. So we decided to go to the capital city, where we would not stand out as much as in a village. We succeeded in renting a small house, and Emmas resumed his secret visits to the congregations as a traveling overseer”.

Another interviewee in Lilongwe commented on the plight of the members of Jehovah’s Witnesses at the time “I know of my own relations who went to live in Zambia, they were living in the wilderness and died leaving their homes. My father went to retrieve one of the children but two siblings died”

Apart from the few leaders of the Jehovah’s witnesses in Malawi who tried to sort out things with the government at the beginning of persecutions to no avail, there seemed to be no one else who spoke out against these human rights violations, there were no civil societies to condemn the violent actions by the government of Malawi and the ruling party of the MCP, the church too watched in silence as these events unfolded.

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<sup>23</sup> This man was interviewed in Lilongwe, he had been in exile and later after democracy came back to Malawi

## 5.7 The Silent Church

When members of Jehovah's Witness were being persecuted, there was no reaction from the Church community. In this study I have not found any documents showing or explaining the attempt by the church in Malawi to assist in subduing the persecutions. There was no official statement made by the churches to clarify their position, again I have not come across any evidence that the churches encouraged the persecution of the Jehovah's Witnesses. In general, the Church was silent at the time of persecution. The ecumenical institutions such as the Malawi Council of Churches and Evangelical Association of Malawi among others seemed to have been caught up in one area of proclaiming the gospel and not concerned with the social issues of human rights violation. In addition to the persecution of members of JW, there were other human rights violations going on and it would take some years before the Church stepped up and voiced out against injustices in Malawi.

The leader of the Evangelical Association of Malawi, pointed out how the church was silent on the issue of the Jehovah's Witness, they were quiet without any reaction. For the Evangelical Churches evangelism was the focus and their priority and the social issues went unnoticed. In general the Church's approach took a dimension that would ignore the persecution of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

<sup>24</sup> "EAM was there, but what happened is that EAM was established in 1962 and our main emphasis then was evangelism and prayer. The main reason why EAM was established was because of the rise to liberalism. We were very concerned with diluted gospel so we were there to safeguard the gospel, promoting sound Bible teaching against liberal theology... When all that was happening, there was very little we could do because that was not our focus... we were very narrow minded. But if the same things were to happen now, issues of human rights violations we would definitely speak out, because we know it is our responsibility".

The director of Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) during an interview mentioned that there was no immediate action by the Church, but quickly mentioned the letter that the Catholic Bishops of Malawi released later in 1992. "No, when the Jehovah's Witnesses were persecuted then of course there was no out-right reaction by the Catholic Church". The pastoral letter was released a couple of decades later, which addressed several social issues that seemed to have deteriorated at the time.

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<sup>24</sup> The General Secretary of Evangelical Association of Malawi (EAM)

Another response from the General Secretary of Evangelical Association of Malawi

“I doubt if the Church may have spoken, I would be interested to know who spoke. The other reason possibly why the Church may have not spoken, we are talking of dictatorship, no one would question Kamuzu as a dictator, anything that he says goes. And so you find that the Church was almost working hand in hand with the government, I think it would have taken a lot of courage for someone to question”<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, some participants during the interviews explained how members of other churches took part in the atrocities that were committed to them. One female interviewee talked of how other Christians she knew took part in persecution “Those people who used to beat us up some of them were Christians too, belonging to other denominations, today some are pastors” and another interviewee commented. “Members of other denominations were around, and they were working with the government, we did not have democracy then and there was no freedom of speech”<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>27</sup>“They were in agreement with the government, both of them were the cause of our suffering and leaders of other churches did not appreciate that we took no part in politics and they were part of those who were beating us up”

## **5.8 Conclusion**

The above are the findings, which include the experience of JW members and the role that the churches played at the time of persecution; silent. I will come back to the topic of silent Church in the analysis chapter. This chapter has outlined the findings of the study together with the responses from the participants during the interviews. The findings have been grouped in themes that emerged during the study and detailed explanations of the findings have been given. This chapter has answered the first part of the research question, by accomplishing the first two objectives which are; to give a description and to record the historical realities experienced by the victims of religious persecution in Malawi; experiences of members of Jehovah’s Witnesses between 1960’s and 1990’s. And to explore the role that the Church played in enhancing or subsiding the religious freedom and human rights in Malawi in connection with the Jehovah’s Witnesses situation.

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<sup>25</sup> General Secretary of Evangelical Association of Malawi

<sup>26</sup> From the focus group discussion in Ntcheu

<sup>27</sup> A male participant who was interviewed in Lilongwe

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE ROLE OF THE CHURCHES IN ADVOCACY; THE SITUATION OF VICTIMS OF RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION BETWEEN 1964 AND 1994

#### 6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, research findings of the study have been presented, detailing the experiences of religious victims of Jehovah's Witness. The refusal to purchase the Malawi Congress Party cards emerged as the immediate cause of their suffering because it portrayed an open rebellious towards the government of Dr. Kamuzu Banda. Their experiences of sufferings include; losing of property and crops, discrimination, many of them were arrested, beaten and others died. Those who were able to escape, left their home country into exile. Again, the findings show that the churches in Malawi were silent; at least they did not openly condemn the acts of brutality that the government of Malawi and MCP committed.

In this analysis chapter I seek to explore more on the role that the churches played from 1964 to 1994 in connection with the Jehovah's Witness situation. Secondly, to analyze the Church in Malawi today as part of civil society, being a prophetic voice and advocating for religious freedom and human rights. Looking at the churches in Malawi critically, one finds out that there has been time when they have supported malevolent whether directly or indirectly and again they have been times when they have relentlessly worked towards peace and good will.

Religion, has continued to be undeniably dynamic in its influence in lives of many people in the world for a long time; it has had impact in fostering political good and political evil over the centuries; it has borne compassion and malice, enforced peace and pathos all these to great magnitude. The better approach to respond to the evils that religion has brought about would not be; to be detached from it or anticipation its extinction, which I would say is losing touch with reality. Rather, the good of religion should be encouraged, and the pathos should be castigated and not to dismiss religion as a whole; the practices and teachings of religion that are favourable to human rights should be cultivated and confirmed. (Witte J. Jr and Green C.M, 2011:15)

The response of the mainline churches in Malawi to the persecution of the Jehovah's Witnesses will be scrutinized. Furthermore, the reaction of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society in regard to the adversity of their members in Malawi shall be discussed as well.

Today we still find that many religious minority groups continue to struggle to have the freedom of worship, nevertheless the extent to which people are repressed in regard to freedom of worship, differs from one country to another. Religious groups have often found themselves in dilemma when their beliefs, views, and values clash with those of the rule of the land or if you may of the government. Many religious persecutions, violence and struggles have often emerged out of clash of views with the government of the day. Yet, this has not driven religion away even where the efforts have been put in place to get rid of it; instead it continues to grow to this day and age, and it is going to still be around as long as humans exist.

“In the course of the twentieth century, religion defied the wistful assumptions of the western academy that the spread of Enlightenment reason and science would slowly eclipse the sense of the sacred and the sensibility of the superstitious. Religion also defied the evil assumptions of Nazis, Fascist, and Communist that gulags and death camps, iconoclasm and book burning, propaganda and mind controls would inevitably drive religion into extinction. Now, yet another great awakening of religion is upon us-global in its sweep and frightening in its power”. ”. (Witter J. Jr &Green C. 2011, p 15)

## **6.2 The Silent Church**

In the findings chapter, I mentioned of the churches' silence when members of Jehovah's Witness were being persecuted. In this section, I would like to discuss more about the silent church. The situation with the Jehovah's Witnesses in Malawi was an opportunity presented itself for the churches to exercise Prophetic Diakonia; challenging the leaders and call for a just practice.

The word diakonia is widely used in the international Church community such as World Council of Churches, which mainline churches in Malawi are part of, even though the word diakonia itself is it not used in the context of Malawi churches. Therefore, let me give a definition of the word diakonia as I prefer and understand it; “Diakonia is a theological concept that points to the very identity and mission of the Church. A call to action, as a response to challenge of human suffering, injustice and care for creation”. (Diakonia in context, 2009:8).

The Church's mandate goes beyond just preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The actions of the Church must also reflect the message it preaches. The Church should be a prophetic voice and must seek to speak against injustices of the society. "A basic assumption is that diakonia and its prophetic expression must be sensitive to suffering and Injustice, or expressed in ecclesiological terms: it must be incarnated in human reality, following the mandate the Lord gave his disciple" (Nordstokke K, 2009:49).

It could be argued that there were practical realities why the churches in Malawi said nothing against the injustices committed toward the Jehovah's Witnesses; the circumstances that the church was in might not have been easy as it sounds for the churches to confront the government of Dr. Kamuzu Banda. He was the leader whom people looked up to with so much pride and hope, a Malawian leader who they could identify with after so many years under foreign rule. This was a new era for Malawi; there was so much patriotic spirit in the air. At this point in history most African countries were fighting for self-rule governments and Malawi was no exception. When Kamuzu Banda finally became the president of Malawi, people had the feeling of being liberated from oppression.

Unfortunately, while the disposition of the country was that of celebration, Dr. Kamuzu Banda took an advantage and placed policies that eventually granted him absolute power. The new leader was working towards establishing his manifesto; he was not going to let anyone stand in his way towards gaining total control of the country, including the churches, in the pre-independence years the MCP showed a dislike to religious bodies and once attacked the Roman Catholic church in Malawi through local News Paper "The Malawi Congress Party, the Chief, and the African people of Malawi are up to repel the threat to Malawi National Independence by the Roman Catholic Church in Nyasaland" (Schoffeleers, 1999:34). Kamuzu Banda took care of all 'trouble makers' and at the same time he had a massive support from the general population. Not long after independent, persecution of the Jehovah's Witness begun how could the churches stand up against him? Fear slipped in, and there it was, into silent the churches went. Richard Carver as quoted by Matthew Schoffeleers explains.

"It is notable that neither the Catholic, Presbyterian or Anglican Church thought it right to make public protest against these quite appalling procedures... The reasons for this were somewhat different in the case of different churches. The Presbyterian Church had a historical link with the MCP which made it rather difficult for it to

criticise government. The Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches had a historical anti-MCP bias; at least it was perceived as such, which made them equally reluctant to be seen to be criticising the government, though for a quite different reason. So for whatever reasons, the major churches in Malawi did not speak out critically about the actions of the State". ( ibid, 1999:91, 92).

The government had total control of different institutions such as media, judiciary, economy and it had influence even within the churches.

“Aside from the constitutional limitations, there was little in the way of formal regulation of religion. It was the direct and non-legal approaches to rule, generally employed by Banda – directives to the Malawi Young Pioneers and the Youth League - which effected most of the policy of religious intolerance”. (Boyle and Sheen, 1997:3)

Later on, a human rights watch report for Malawi in 1990 made an assessment on the challenges that the country was undergoing as a direct result of dictatorship kind of leadership.

“The hostility to books and the press is only one of the more visible signs of a highly organized system for suppressing dissent. Malawi exhibits an unusual degree of totalitarian control for an African country, with rigid control of all institutions of political and civil society. The legal profession, for example, is impotent because all important cases are heard before "traditional courts" where lawyers have no right to be heard and judges are answerable directly to the President. The Protestant churches are largely held in thrall by Banda's position as an elder of the Church of Scotland. The localities are policed by members of the party and the paramilitary Young Pioneers, who sell party cards and eavesdrop on "subversive" talk.”

(<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/publisher,HRW,,MWI,467fca29e,0.html> Accessed on 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2013)

The church was there, they saw it all, anxiety crept in and silence and fear over powered justice; intolerant of dissent became rampant and many atrocities were committed. Constitutionally, Malawi had freedom of worship, but in reality that freedom was restricted; the state often interfered with the activities of the church, no one dared to speak in opposition of the government, such was the terror atmosphere in Malawi. The religious institutions were not spared from these suspicions and all activities had to be carried with caution and the non-existence of the church's efforts in being a prophetic voice for the weak resulted in suffering of people. So here we see the position that the churches were in.

Other individuals who were church leaders condemned the act and spoke out against the persecution of the Jehovah's Witness and the deteriorating social injustices in general. For example; Ross mentions of other leaders in Blantyre Synod who dared to speak against the Kamuzu Banda regime. Jonathan Sangaya who often spoke frankly to the president about evils which were prevailing in Malawi, and at some point it is allegedly believed that he confronted the president's relationship with his companion Miss Kadzamira (Ross, 19996). "Peter Kaleso, a young minister in the Synod of Blantyre, decided that he could not remain silent; after his studies in Scotland from 1979 to 1981 he had returned to Malawi determined that the church should firmly challenge the political oppression and social injustice...was prepared to risk everything in order to address the Word of God prophetically to the social injustices which had become prevalent in Malawi". (Schoffeleers, 1999:102,103) others were Rev Saindi Chipangwi and Silas Ncozana.

Ncozana; "...was deeply troubled personally by the national situation, waited for the day when there would be opportunity for critical and constructive engagement on the part of church leader. He confessed the profound sense of powerlessness which he felt, e.g., when a Jehovah's Witness came to plead with him that the church may take a stand for religious freedom and he had to decline any action or speak a single word". (Schoffeleers, 1999:104)

Later, Ncozana was to exercise an important role in the political change movement which rose in the wake of the pastoral letter of 1992 (In the later section of this chapter, I will give a more description of the 1992 Pastoral Letter). Some people who dared to speak out against what was happening ended up being dismissed from their position and others who were expatriates were deported back to their countries. Two Anglican priests were dismissed "When Fr. Frank Mkata and Fr. Humphrey Taylor decided to take a tape recorder and tape the singing in the prison they offended against the system. The church was ordered to send Fr. Frank to Likoma Island and Fr. Taylor was deported. The church did what the government wanted". (Tengatenga, 2006:115)

Another Anglican priest was Fr. Biggers; at the time he was a missionary in the Diocese of Lake Malawi in Central Africa; was later deported "On July 18, 1974, Fr. Biggers received a letter from the Department of Immigration of Malawi, saying that his work permit was being revoked and that he should plan to be out of Malawi by August 1. No reason for this action was given by the government. Work permits were issued for two years at a time, and Fr.

Biggers' work permit had been approved and renewed only last May”  
([http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/ENS/ENSpress\\_release.pl?pr\\_number=74234](http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/ENS/ENSpress_release.pl?pr_number=74234)).

The above mentioned people tried to speak out as individuals; the problem was that they encountered opposition, not only from the MCP government, but also from fellow church leaders who dared not to speak anything against Kamuzu Banda and his regime. There might have been other unnamed individuals within the churches who tried to speak out, but we will never know. There was not support from the churches in Malawi, in the end they had to bear the consequences of their actions alone.

Despite that the surrounding circumstances were hard and not conducive; churches in Malawi lost an opportunity to up-hold the human dignity for all. Prophetic diakonia must take place where justice and dignity of human beings is threatened and not when it is comfortable to do so. “The defence of the weak is not primarily to be motivated in the mercy of the strong, but in the dignity of the marginalized and suffering that diakonia has a holy pledge towards”. (Nordstokke, 2009:96). It could be also that the major difference in doctrinal issues between the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the mainline churches caused the churches in Malawi to display apathetic approach in response to the plight of the members of Jehovah’s Witness. All human beings, regardless of who they are, bear the image of God and their dignity and human rights including on freedom of religion must be up-held.

“...the respect that humans as such are entitled to as something grounded, not in what we happen to care about or in what we happen to have committed ourselves to, but in facts about what humans are actually like, or, more accurately, what they have been made by the Creator to be like-like unto himself and by virtue of that likeness sacred and inviolable”. (Witte and Alexander, 2010:226)

The mainline churches might have perceived the persecution of the Jehovah’s Witnesses as an opportunity to deal with those who were theologically divergent, forgetting that like everyone else, members of Jehovah’s Witness have rights to freedom of religion that needed to be respected not only just being tolerated. “Christianity and human rights provide for, and demand, underlying foundation that speaks to the timeless importance of an embrace of human dignity and of human rights everywhere”. (Witte and Alexander, 2010:320, 321). When the churches remained silent, they were not free themselves; by denying others freedom

of worship, the churches lost freedom too; there was so much fear even at a local congregation preachers had to be careful in what they say, because informers were everywhere.

“Whenever the church leaders were asked to preach at the state functions the government functionaries required that the sermon be presented to them. They would edit and excise those parts that were unflattering to Ngwazi and those parts that were perceived to be critical of the status quo”. (Tengatenga, 2006:114)

For 30 years there was no total freedom of worship in Malawi until the church became prophetic and presented Christ as he should be presented. “Anabaptists believed that true Christian witness, true Christian evangelism, confronts not only individuals but also nations and institutions. Witness must deal with public life and its goal must be the transformation of all society. The church is an exemplary community precisely in order to heal the nations, to be God’s agent in bringing injustice and war to an end”. (Plantak, 1998:135). The power of the gospel must dare to challenge the oppressors of the weak and vulnerable; the concern for the church should be for the wider community not just those within our churches and must include those that believe differently.

In line with Jeremy Waldron as quoted in Witte Jr. and Alexander who argue “that human rights theory can avail itself of deep insights generated by the idea of *imago Dei*<sup>28</sup>” (Witte, Jr. and Alexander, 2010:217). It is easy to advocate the freedom of those who are like us, those who believe like we do, but the church has the higher calling, to defend the marginalized, just as God defends the weak and the poor, for every human person bears the image of his/her Creator. The Church

“...needs to continue to be new, progressive, inventive, creative, and existential to meaningful to every generation. It needs to build on the old and every time surpass it. It needs to be truthful to its past, and yet look to the future. It needs to be practical and efficient as well as theoretical and well thought out (Plantak, 1998:150).

The silence of the church in Malawi meant that the churches compromised their role of being a prophetic voice.

The silence of the churches contributed to the intolerance towards members of Jehovah’s Witness at the grass root level. While leaders of the churches opted for silent, members of mainline churches at grassroots did not remain silent. Intolerance is not attributed to a

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<sup>28</sup> The doctrine that men and women are created in the image of God

particular or single group of people; today we see continuous discrimination of others based on their belief. The church's diaconal work must include all those in need without discrimination regardless of their race, tribe, gender, economic class, and indeed religion, even when those in need, have a different belief. 'Others' should not only be tolerated but respected as human beings Witter and Alexander put it in a very interesting manner;

“It is important to differentiate respect from mere tolerance. Respect elevates. Tolerance seeks a lower common denominator. Respect ultimately comes from the heart. Tolerance is an exercise of the intellect. Respect celebrates humanity. Tolerance allows for cheap form of grace to be applied to people we do not especially like. It is forbearance, not equality. Tolerance is a lesser value. Those who reflect “the image of God” must demonstrate respect.<sup>29</sup>

The silence by the churches provided an atmosphere that allowed their members at grass root level to take part in the persecutions of Jehovah's Witnesses (refer in the findings chapter five). The silence encouraged other Christians to discriminate members of JW; it is at the bottom level where daily struggles are experienced, the consequences of the decisions made above are much felt by the people below. People took advantage of the circumstances with members of JW to their own benefits, committing lots of abuses without the fear of being charged or accused with any criminal offenses for their actions.

Lives were threatened and in other cases lost as a direct result of the persecutions. The lack of the voice of the Church to the situation of the Jehovah's Witnesses placed the churches on the same side with the mighty, the oppressor and those who abused their power. People suffered, and nothing was said to confront the situation. The Jehovah's Witnesses' different views on politics, different opinion and beliefs caused them to pay dearly for those views.

As already mentioned, it may be said that the political atmosphere was not conducive enough for the church to speak out against the government of Dr. Kamuzu Banda, but the response by the churches in Malawi was not in line with ecumenical diakonia which takes place in the midst of a world of injustice, exclusion, violence and death. Furthermore, there was no strong ecumenical involvement by mainline churches, each denomination worked in isolation.

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<sup>29</sup> John Witte, Jr. and Frank S. Alexander *Christianity and Human Rights; An Introduction*, Cambridge University, 2010

This non-existence of unity and solidarity among mainline churches resulted in absence of dialogues concerning the social issues of the country and made it very difficult for individual denomination to take a stand against the government of Kamuzu Banda. It is important to show love in word and deed and churches must say; Enough! Things cannot go on this way! A conversion of value is urgently needed. We have to testify with our actions the same way Jesus Christ: (Ferguson and Ortega:2002)

“In the face of Empire and exile Jeremiah in his letter to the exiles called them to act locally to seek the shalom of the city where they dwell). (Ferguson and Ortega:2002). However, we do not see much of the Mainline churches’ involvement in regard to fight for justice, and religious freedom for all as a human right, it leaves one to wonder whether the churches could have spoken out if this was done to their and not the Jehovah’s witnesses who believe differently.

### **6.3 The Church of Central African Presbyterian**

The Church of Central African Presbyterian (CCAP) is the largest protestant denomination in Malawi; it has three synods across the country, Blantyre synod in the south, Nkhoma synod at the central and Livingstonia synod in the north. I am going to show how the CCAP sided with the government even when they should have been on the side of the weak. The Presbyterian Church had historical links with the Malawi government and church members took part in limiting the freedom of expression in the country as they sat on the Censorship Board. “When members of the churches did speak out, such as the Reverend Peter Kaleso of the CCAP in the early 1980’s, their own hierarchies sided with the government. (Schoffeleers,1999). Kamuzu Banda was a self-proclaimed Christian and an elder of the Church of Scotland; with recommendation from an old missionary to Malawi – Dr. Cullen Young, Banda received support from the CCAP and Christians in general. (Schoffeleers, 1999:96)

#### **6.3.1 Nkhoma Synod**

Highlight the position of the Nkhoma Synod; in the early years leading to independent (about mid 1960’s), Dr. Banda’s government and the Church of Central African Presbyterian, Nkhoma Synod of Malawi signed memorandums of understanding assuring the close working relationship between the synod and the Malawi Congress Party, Banda was still the Prime Minister of Malawi.

One of the earliest of those agreements is explained by Dr. W.L. Brown in his dissertation presented for the Degree of Doctor of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch. In 1963 the General Administrative Committee of the Nkhoma Synod sent a delegation to Dr. Banda to discuss issues concerning the policy of the Regional Synod of Nkhoma, the synod's work and its relationship with the government. The following is a memorandum that was drafted regarding these issues.

“The Right Honorable, the first Prime Minister of Malawi, the Life President of Malawi Congress Party, the founder of Malawi Nation and the Minister of Natural Resources and Surveys: on behalf of Nkhoma synod, sir, we wish to express our thanks for the honour and opportunity that we are accorded to present this memorandum to you . . . Since 1962 the <sup>30</sup>D.R.C.M. has been fully dissolved in <sup>31</sup>Nyasaland, and all responsibilities which were previously held by the Mission Council, and all property have been transferred to Nkhoma Synod. All mission personnel became members of the CCAP and are under full control of the Nkhoma Synod. The Nkhoma Synod will still need and welcome fraternal workers from South Africa who wish to serve the Church in this country, on condition that such workers shall respect the national aspirations of the Malawi people, and will comply with the regulations laid down by the Government for such expatriate workers . . . the Nkhoma Synod of the CCAP fully recognizes the national and political aspirations of the people of Malawi. The Nkhoma Synod fully accepts your genuine leadership and remembers with gratitude the peaceful way in which you brought the people of Malawi from colonial rule to the status of self-government and independence. The Nkhoma synod would like to assure you that the church shall do everything in its power to support the constitutionally elected Government”. (Brown 2004:221 -222)

There was an on-going communication between the Nkhoma Synod and government, starting from 1960's to early 1990's. Most of the Nkhoma Synod reports for this period included applauses and thanks for Ngwazi Dr. Kamuzu Banda and his government. Several letters were written and sent between the government and the church (Nkhoma Synod) showing support for Ngwazi Dr. Kamuzu Banda. Part of the report in 1979 read (As quoted by Brown)

The political life of the country has, during 1979, maintained the progress which had started with the attainment of Independence in 1964. The policy of dialogue and friendliness with neighboring countries has been maintained. The Life President Ngwazi Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda has time and again reiterated (sic) that he is prepared to talk to anyone, friend or enemy because he does not believe in isolating others or denouncing them. Peace and calm in the country has increased considerably. We, as

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<sup>30</sup> Dutch Reformed Church Mission

<sup>31</sup> Before independent Malawi was called Nyasaland

a church, are pleased and praise God that freedom of worship was maintained. The President continues to encourage the people to worship God in the way they believe is right without any interference (sic). He himself attends Worship Services whenever time allows him to do so especially on important days like Martyrs Day and Independence Day. He even appeals to his ministers and people to follow his example and that everyone should worship in the way he feels is right. (Brown, 2004:226)

Nkhoma Synod's decision to work with Dr. Banda could be justified, in a sense that; prior to independent both the church and the MCP had a common goal and that was to free the people of Malawi from the British invasion. Nevertheless, the problem arose when the church continued to support the government even at the time when the church should have challenged some of the government's actions. There were detentions of people for long time without trial, suppression of freedom of speech, suppression of religious freedom and of course persecution of the members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

As a result of the agreements signed, the church was positioned in a place where it felt obliged to always show an appreciation and compelled to support Dr. Kamuzu Banda and MCP. In addition to the persecution of the Jehovah's Witnesses; everyone felt the sting of Kamuzu Banda's leadership, there was fear everywhere and as the church continued to remain silent on the important issues, things got worse and there were so many restrictions on information.

In all communication between the government and the Nkhoma Synod, there is no mention of the situation and the plight of members of Jehovah's Witness, and it was during the same period that reports from the Nkhoma Synod indicates that there was considerably increased peace and calm in the country, yet persecutions were taking place. The church turned a blind eye to the sufferings it was surrounded by. Going back to the theory of prophetic diakonia, which posits that the "intrinsic nature of diakonia, affirming that the prophetic task is part of the mandate and authority that God has given the Church and its diakonia" (Diakonia in Context, 2009, 82). I find it important to state that the understanding of prophetic diakonia calls on the church to resist powers that abuses people, to be an advocate. The findings show that the church in Malawi overlooked this important mandate when it came to the persecution of members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

### **6.3.2 Blantyre Synod**

Blantyre Synod was in strong support of the struggle for independence, and supported the Nyasaland African Congress – later to become Malawi Congress Party (MCP). Like their companions in the Nkhoma Synod, Blantyre Synod showed support of the government by repressing those individual in the church who dared to speak against the injustices of the society. Later on in 1993, the Blantyre Synod of the Church of Central African Presbyterian issued a statement which acknowledged historically close ties with the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) so that "the church gradually lost its ability to admonish or speak pastorally to the government" and indicated that they did "not want to make the same mistake at this time in order to ensure that the church retains its prophetic voice throughout the coming years of our country's history." (Ross, 1995)

### **6.3.3 Livingstonia Synod**

Messages showing loyalty were sent to President Kamuzu Banda and the MCP. In 1980 the Livingstonia Synod had this to say about Kamuzu Banda and his government.

"We give thanks to God for the political stability, peace and calm, law and order prevailing in the country. We give thanks and praise to God for the freedom of worship we continue to enjoy in this country under your wise and dynamic leadership. These favorable conditions have given us a unique opportunity to proclaim the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ freely. We pray that God may continue to bless our country, giving it righteousness that by His guidance we may play our role in promoting Christian love and understanding among your people in Malawi. We assure you, Your Excellency, that the CCAP Synod of Livingstonia prays for you personally, the party, the government and the people of Malawi so that justice and tranquility may continue to prevail in our beloved land" (Schoffeleers, 1999:97)

## **6.4 Roman Catholic Church**

Taking into account the strained relationship that existed between the Roman Catholic Church and the government, the church took a more passive approach when it came to confronting the government. There was an attack from the government on the Roman Catholic Church in Malawi News Paper of 22 October, 1960. "The paper on that occasion accused the church, in the person of its Archbishop, the Most Rev Dr. J.B. Theunissen, of having been actively involved in the foundation of the Christian Democratic Party (CDP), which was an opposition party which in the words of its manifesto, aimed at "safeguarding the Christian faith", and

“protecting the country from the threat of despotism”. (Schoffeleers, 1999:17). In the long run there was silent too on the side of the Roman Catholics.

It will be later in the 1980’s that the Roman Catholic would start working underground to fight for the human rights and justice for the people of Malawi action which would later lead to the official release of pastoral letter on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1992. This could be in line with the social teaching of the Catholics Church that took root in Africa in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s. One of the people who actively got involved in getting information out of what was really happening in Malawi was father Pádraig Ó Máille, “...We reactivated the Amnesty International campaign, and the international support network, and hoped that renewed pressure would work”. (Máille, 1999:102,103).

The government system was that such that even sermons in local church were listened to by informers, any one could have been an informer either members or the leadership, for that reason great care had to be taken on what was said everywhere including in the churches. Even though other churches were allowed to worship, there was much censorship on what could be said, because members of the youth league who were present at the community level and in villages were spies who took it upon themselves to enforce respect for Kamuzu Banda.

## **6.5 The Lent Pastoral Letter of 8 March, 1992**

In 1992 the Roman Catholic Bishops of Malawi released a Pastoral Letter entitled *‘Living our faith’*; the pastoral letter confronted the government and pointed out on governance policies and human rights concerns. The letter did not specifically mention the Jehovah’s Witness, I would assume because it had been long time since Jehovah’s Witness was banned in Malawi, about 25years to this point, let me be quick to point out that members of Jehovah’s Witness were still experiencing persecution but at a moderate level at the time the Pastoral Letter was released. In addition, there were many social concerns in Malawi that required serious consideration as well which included among others; The aspiration to greater equality and unity, The right to an adequate education, Adequate health services for all, Participation of all in public life, Freedom of expression and association, Fostering Participation and a system of justice which works fairly.

The Roman Catholic bishops upheld the good things that had been achieved and accomplished by the government, and also denounced various social injustices that were taking place. In this pastoral letter "*Living our faith*" the Catholic bishops of Malawi concluded with the following statement;

"The issues raised in this letter will obviously require an ongoing and more in depth reflection. It is the Church's mission to preach the Gospel which effects the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation, be it hunger, ignorance, blindness, despair, paralyzing fear, etc. Like Jesus, the advocate of the poor and the oppressed, the believing community is invited, at times obliged in justice, to show in action a preferential love for the economically disadvantaged, the voiceless who live in situations of hopelessness". (Living Our Faith, 1992:11)

These issues were brought to light and mentioned in details because they did not reflect the interest of people of Malawi. There is one section that I would like to highlight, which I assume generally it included the members of Jehovah's Witness even though they are not mentioned by the name.

Moreover human persons are honoured – and this honour is due to them – whenever they are allowed to search freely for the truth, to voice their opinions and be heard, to engage in creative service of the community in all liberty within the associations of their own choice. Nobody should ever have to suffer reprisals for honestly expressing and living up to their convictions: intellectual, religious or political... Academic freedom is seriously restricted; exposing injustices can be considered a betrayal; revealing some evils of our society is seen as slandering the country; monopoly of mass media and censorship prevent the expression of dissenting views; some people have paid dearly for their political opinions; access to public places like markets, hospitals, bus depots, etc., is frequently denied to those who cannot produce a party card; forced donations have become a way of life". (Living Our Faith, 1992:8, 9)

The Pastoral Letter triggered the beginning of a new era in Malawi. The churches adopted a prophetic stance. This was the begging of the church's distancing itself from the state and therefore becoming separating ties between the between the church and the state. (Tengatenga, 2006:34).

"Few would be bold enough to deny the critical significance of churches in Malawi's recent political history. From the catalytic distribution of the 8 March 1992 Catholic Pastoral Letter to the activities of the Public Affairs Committee (PAC) in both

Referendum and the General Election, Malawi's clergy played a central role in initiating, accelerating, and presiding over the country's movement to a multi-party system" ( Phiri & Ross, 1998:102)

The realisation of the Pastoral Letter, was a landmark in the Church and political life in Malawi, it was so dynamic in the sense that it broke the silence of the churches, and changed the course that the churches in Malawi would take in dealing with social injustice. The response from the government was so radical, so much so that the lives of the Roman Catholic Bishops were threatened, but the horizon of hope could be felt in the hearts of Malawians.

"As if someone turned on a light switch the attitudes and acts have changed. This letter gave hope, first the Catholics who heard it out of the blue one Sunday morning, then others later heard of it. At last it seemed the Church would stand up for human rights and political freedom, thereby providing people with an organisation and support to direct their long simmering resentment. It was truly astounding to see people go from hopelessness and dejection to optimism and energy". (Schoffeleers, 1999:121).

It is important to acknowledge that other mainline churches and religions also supported Kamuzu Banda to some extent "It was not only the CCAP which lent support to the government; the annual independence day celebrations, for instance, were officiated at by Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Seven-Day Adventists, as well as by Muslims and Hindus. Such widespread and tacit acceptance of the status quo made it extremely difficult for any religious group to speak out (Gibbs and Ajulu,1999:59).

## **6.6 The Role of the churches in advocacy after the Pastoral Letter in 1992**

After 1992 we see the churches in Malawi changing positions when coming to advocating for Human Rights and Justice, upholding human dignity, and being the voice for the voiceless. Today the churches in Malawi are more or less like civil institutions they are independent from the state, and confront social issues that concern the citizens of Malawi.

"Civil institutions are those that are not involved in the business of government or overt political management. They are not political parties. But this does not prevent civil society from exercising profound political influence, on matters ranging from single issues to national constitutions". (African Rights, 1995:5)

Constitutionally, the church and the state are separate in Malawi, however it is worthy noting that the churches have excised profound political influence, in addition to the mentioned pastoral letter, the churches played an important role in the process of one party to multiparty in Malawi. Since democracy came to Malawi in 1994, the churches have had strong voices on issues of national concern and have continued making a substantial impact in the politics of the country. The church being a non-partisan tries to be neutral when addressing social issues, and confronts most matters that threaten the dignity of people.

“No one can doubt that during Banda’s era, it was very costly for the church to speak out against the injustices of that time, and indeed the church did too little to challenge autocracy and abuses of power. However, it is also true that the church has played a vital role in obtaining multiparty democracy in Malawi” (Schoffeleers, 200:9)

The formation of a joint religious civil society group known as Public Affairs Committee (PAC) symbolizes the strong ecumenical unity of the churches. PAC was established following the 1992 Pastoral Letter, it began as a broad based movement for change from one party to multiparty, through democratic system between the years of 1992 to 1994. It was led by the religious community and included political pressure groups and other interested groups. Following the political transition, the Public Affairs Committee remained a faith based organization focusing on the democratization process. In 1995 PAC established a secretariat to manage its programs.

From the time of its start the Public Affairs Committee (PAC) has developed even further not only as a civil society, today it is an interfaith organization advocating for the rights of people in Malawi. PAC is made up of the main Protestant churches, Roman Catholic and Muslim faith groups. It operates in the areas of good governance and human rights. The members of Public Affairs Committee include; the Malawi Council of Churches (MCC), Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM), Evangelical Association of Malawi (EAM), Muslim Association of Malawi (MAM) and Quadria Muslim Association of Malawi (QMAM). From these main faith groups, PAC draws 24 member organizations and four associate members. Together they have become a strong voice that has continued to stand for the freedom of religion for all; they are almost like human right ‘watch dogs’ in Malawi. The mission of this Public Affairs Committee is ‘An interfaith organization that promotes human dignity in the

Malawian society through advocacy, civic education and conflict transformation. (<http://www.pacmw.org/index.html> was accessed on 1 Dec, 2012).

Even though there was the period of silence by the churches, it is important to note that during colonization period, church members played a part in influencing the politics of the country mainly in their fight against injustice of colonial rule. Several Christian individuals, who attended missionary run schools and had theological background took a stand against injustice; many of the students from these missionary schools became activist and were against the treatment that Malawians received from the colonial government officials and ironically they were also against the treatment that missionaries gave to people of Malawi as well; in chapter four I have given a detailed explanation about this.

The church is a strong voice in Malawi, and because of its diaconal mandate, it cannot afford to be quiet when lives are at risk and justice is threatened. It is exciting to see that the church has risen up to its responsibility, and no longer is the church indifference in its action to defend justice. There is room for improvement on the part of the churches, and as the body of Christ, made up with sinners saved by grace, this is going to be a continual fight and the churches must always step up and struggle to defend the weak.

It is the responsibility of the church to stand with those at periphery and those who are suffering. This thesis might serve as a reminder of what happened and for the church to act differently when confronted with the same or similar situations in future. The Church should uphold the dignity of all human beings, which everyone is born with. The churches in Malawi have continued to advocate for social concerns in the country; On 14 March, 2012 the PAC held a meeting which among its objectives was to enhance a unified call for President Bingu wa Muthalika to resign as the president of the country or call for a referendum. Public Affairs Committee organised a national conference to discuss the worsening economic conditions and bad governance, non-observance of some human rights. “We call on the President to call for a national referendum to seek a fresh mandate from the people of Malawi as we believe the sustained trust given to him by the people of Malawi has been eroded”. (<http://www.newstimeafrica.com/archives/24665> Accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2013)

The task of the church and indeed of every Christian should be that, which gives a sense of purpose and belonging and get socially involved in everyday experience. The church “has a mandate to speak for truth and justice even when such witness is very costly”. (Ross:1996). As Christians when the misery of the world takes its toll on human kind pushing our heads down we have a longing to look up to the hope of glory and we want justice to be done, mercy to come through and righteousness to prevail. Christ did not die for sound doctrine of the Church but to save human kind, mercy must also prevail not just being right but also being kind. “And the motivating factors such as love, care, and ‘Christian brotherhood’ would have much greater impact and effect in our social relations to the world”. (Plantak, 1998:133)

## **6.7 The Watch Tower Response to persecution in Malawi**

The Jehovah’s Witness teaching of neutrality when it comes to politics had deadly cost on the JW members in Malawi. In the course of colonialism, non-involvement was seen as a good thing by Malawians as it was considered as part of their resistance to the colonial rule, which everyone was against anyway. But after independence, the same actions stance become anti-Malawian, anti-African government, and was not appreciated by many this led them into serious problems. (Tengatenga :2006)

As seen in previous chapters, this teaching caused members of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Malawi to suffer. By the virtue of being Malawian, one was considered a member of the MCP. People did not have to register to become members of the ruling party, which meant that whether one owned card or did not own any, every Malawian born citizen was deemed a member of the MCP. The only difference in membership was that of active members and passive members, active members were chosen to take different responsibilities in the party on the village level, district level, regional level or national lever and most of them did not have a choice to decline once elected. Malawi as a member of the United Nations beginning from 1<sup>st</sup> December, 1964<sup>32</sup> it was necessary to observe the core standards that were in the International Bill of Human Rights. The foundation of the International Bill of Human Rights goes back to the general declaration of the human right in 1948 in the article 18 which states that;

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.un.int/wcm/content/site/malawi/pid/3295>

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”<sup>33</sup>.

Dr. Kamuzu Banda being an educated man, who got his education in Britain, presumably knew about this declaration of human right on freedom of religion and belief, he also might have known the issues and debates that surrounded this article 18 following its years of establishment; “the issue of the universality and indivisibility of rights, of the primacy of international law over national law and religious codes, of individual, minority and collective rights and of the relationship between rights, duties and community” (Boyle and Sheen, 1997:5). All these issues have raised questions and problems regarding its practicality in Malawi so that even though the “Human rights protections guaranteeing the right to free conscience had been included in the constitution of 1964, but were removed within three years of its coming into effect” (Boyle and Sheen, 1997:37). Thus, many human rights including freedom of expression and freedom of religion and belief among many other freedoms were ruthlessly repressed by the government of Malawi and the ruling party of MCP.

The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society (WTBTS) could have handled the Malawi incident differently than they did. They encouraged their members in their decision to refuse to buy MCP cards; as a way of being neutral, JW members in Malawi could have been given a chance to choose whether to buy a card or not to buy one; They did not have freedom from the law of the country, and the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society did not exercise or respect the freedom of religious conscience of their own members. Again the WTBTS when it came to implementing the teaching of neutrality to their members all over the world, it was applied differently in different countries; they did so with double standards.

I would like to agree with Roger Trigg who talks about freedom of conscience. “Democracies may value freedom of conscience, but no government is going to allow individual or groups to opt out of general laws just because they do not wish to obey the law”. (T2012:91). With that in mind, I would like to stress that the government of Malawi treated members of Jehovah’s Witness unfairly, and in a cruel manner, it was indeed not necessary to take extreme measures that the government took (as laid out in the findings chapter five).

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<sup>33</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18

However, the WTBS should have come to the rescue of their members in Malawi by approving them to exercise free conscience. The Jehovah's Witnesses in Mexico were treated differently during the same time, the Watch Tower Bible and Tract society approved that members of Jehovah's Witnesses in Mexico could bribe officials to obtain a document called 'Cartilla'. This was not the case in Malawi.

Through the process of bribing officials, The WTBS allowed Witnesses in Mexico to obtain a *Cartilla* – Mexico's Identity Booklet of the National Military Service. In order for one to legally get the *Cartilla*, one would have to serve in the military for one year; here freedom of religious conscience was respected but not in Malawi. The Witnesses in Malawi were not allowed to buy a political membership card although it was required by law of Malawi. According to WTBS it was against their rules; highlighting this point they played double standards on these issues and as a result, many innocent people in Malawi were tortured, others murdered and properties were lost. The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society could have let the witnesses in Malawi exercise their conscience just as they did with the Witnesses in Mexico. (Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2013 [http://www.jwfiles.com/wt\\_control/malawi.htm](http://www.jwfiles.com/wt_control/malawi.htm)).

The WTBS knew very well what was happening in Malawi, all the persecution details were reported in the magazines (chapter five has details). There was an awareness of the persecutions that was happening in Malawi. The Branch in South Africa raised support to assist the Jehovah's Witnesses when they were in exile at the refugee camp, which was a good thing and is commendable. However, in my opinion, the Watch Tower Bible and Society Tract betrayed the witnesses in Malawi. Most of the leaders on the decision making level were not Malawians, and the worst punishment they could receive was deportation to their own home countries, yet Malawian members suffered the worst treatment. An option of a free choice should have been given to Malawian members of JW when it came to buy the card. If they were able to exempt their members in Mexico through bribing, it was wrong to refer to the buying of card in Malawi as against their belief, like their counterparts in Mexico who were allowed obtained 'Cartilla' the same standards should have been applied to the Malawi situation.

“This article shows the tragedy that occurred when Malawian Witnesses were hypocritically forced to uphold a higher standard than was expected of those in Mexico, or by the governing body themselves” “Before early 1970s, in order to have a passport, American citizens were required to pledge the oath of allegiance, the

Governing Body members of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society made a separate ruling concerning the pledge, to avoid themselves from trouble. “If the Governing Body reasoned that signing the oath to receive a passport was for the greater good, allowing them to travel and advance the kingdom work, could they not have reasoned the same for the sake of saving humiliation of their followers at school and lives in Malawi?”(<http://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/malawi-mexico-oath-allegiance.php> Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> April, 2013)

## **6.8 Reconciliation**

Reconciliation would be the best way forward, with the victims of religious persecution in Malawi. I have not come across any efforts by the churches in Malawi to help these victims of religious persecution to come to terms with reconciliation. However, there are several challenges that might hinder this process especially with the members of Jehovah’s Witness; the Jehovah’s Witness do work in isolation from other churches; almost all churches in Malawi have some kind of ecumenical associations attached to them, but not the Jehovah’s Witnesses. They are a closed society and do not let others of different faith intervene with their activities. “The only time they like talking about faith is when they would like to evangelize their belief”<sup>34</sup>. In talking with some church leaders, especially those involved in ecumenical work, they made it clear that they do not have any kind of interaction with the Jehovah’s Witness; neither did they know any institution or church that does, even though the mainline churches are open to work with anyone.

“Firstly, as evangelicals we are open to work with a lot of groups, we work with Muslims. Muslims do not accept Jesus Christ as a Son of God, but as a prophet. Jehovah’s Witnesses too do not believe Jesus Christ as God but still we work with Muslims. I think we would have worked with them if they were a bit open especially in terms of opening up to them, but they don’t work with others. From my interactions nationally or internationally with all evangelical network, none of them has ever said they work with Jehovah’s Witnesses, they are loners, they isolate themselves even in participating in government issues”<sup>35</sup>.

There is no existing work relationship with others including the mainline churches, or any kind of official collaboration. A former member of the Jehovah’s Witnesses James Penton confirms this position about the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

“It is well known that they refuse military service, will not join political parties, do not vote, do not hold elected public office, and will not participate in patriotic exercises

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<sup>34</sup> An interview with the one key informant in Blantyre

<sup>35</sup> The General Secretary for Evangelical Association of Malawi

such as flag salute ceremonies. Repeatedly they have been regarded as unpatriotic enemies of the secular state”<sup>36</sup>

Reconciliation is important, the former president of Malawi Bakili Muluzi, soon after taking the government recognised these atrocities and mentioned of compensating the victims of religious persecution. But, I was not able to find anyone who has received any compensation. Because of their “neutral” ground politically, it will be difficult to set up a forum where members of JW could be available and ready to talk as JW members. Nevertheless, even though there has not been the ‘apology forum’ the churches have recognised their mistakes in other forums and articles have been written, recognising that the churches comprised their role of being prophetic voice. Another informant had this to say about the JW in Malawi “On humanitarian grounds the Jehovah’s Witnesses would never hate their torturers because they believe this happened because they are the true believers in God. Therefore the reconciliation would only be on physical, emotional aspect.”<sup>37</sup> Here we see that a subsequent attempt for reconciliation would be necessary and important, but there has to be a desire to do so from both sides including the offended party, which is lacking in this case of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Malawi.

## **6.9. Conclusion**

Since democracy in 1994, there is freedom of religion, freedom of worship, and freedom of association. People can worship however they want to and can belong to any religious group or association without any fear of being persecuted; at the moment nobody is persecuted in Malawi because of his/her religion anymore.

As the concept of prophetic diakonia emphasises on the leadership role, it draws its meaning from the New Testament and has continued to develop. The church in Malawi overlooked the role of being Prophetic Diakonia, “one important starting point for prophetic diakonia is to listen to voices of suffering and marginalized people”. (*Diakonia in Context, Transformation, Reconciliation and empowerment*, 2009:81). Prophetic Diakonia has to be aware and conscious of changing times, it has to be relevant to the context and present situation. This is what the churches in Malawi had failed to see and act upon. The ‘present’ situation of that time called for the church to act but the church remained quiet. Even though the beliefs are

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<sup>36</sup><http://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?collection=journals&handle=hein.journals/jchs21&div=12&id=&page>

<sup>37</sup> A response from one informer who witnessed the persecution of Jehovah’s Witnesses

different, the Jehovah's Witnesses members were a 'neighbour in need' and the church was to exercise the second greatest commandment of love.

Beginning from the period of independent (1964) to democracy (1994), the Church in Malawi can be described as the silent church. In the midst of government's grievous actions like violation of human rights; there was no church involvement in addressing those human rights issues as Kenneth Ross explains;

“From the time of independence in 1964, the churches in Malawi appeared to be compliant supporters of “life president” Kamuzu Banda and his repressive one-party regime. Every Sunday in all churches of all denominations leaders prayed for the longer life and prosperity to the dictator who was ruthlessly exploiting and brutally oppressing the people. At every nation occasion, the church leaders were present to provide the religious legitimation for the political quo” (Ross, 2010:38)

The churches in Malawi failed to live up to the ideals, which it had long been advocating; Love for the neighbor. The power of the 'mighty' ones was not resisted, the church must advocate for the marginalized. The differences in belief should not be used to justify the indifferent attitude towards those that are facing injustice or are being marginalized. Is it possible for the churches to risk for the sake of justice?

“As the new political dispensation dawned in Malawi, the churches were quick to indicate that they would continue to play an active role in the politics of the country. The lessons of the past had been learned. Silence and inaction on matters of public interest was not only bad for the country, but also contrary to the church's understanding of its mission in the world. Similarly, too close relationship with political interests comprised the prophetic role of the church”. (Ross, 1998:109)

There is “...the need of constant reformation in the life of the Church so that we are liberated, renewed and reminded of our God-given mandate and to be on the way – even when this is a way of the cross”.(Ross, 2010:38). The Church in Malawi made some progress in recognizing mistakes of the past when her role of prophetic voice was compromised. Today the Church is very pro-active in addressing social issues in the country.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **SUMMARY OF THE STUDY**

#### **7.1 Summary**

This study has documented the experiences of members of Jehovah's Witness in Malawi for the period of three decades; from 1964 to 1994. Chapter one introduced the study, the research question and the motivation for the chosen topic. Chapter two gave the contextual background of the history of Malawi starting from Malawi's independent in 1964 to democracy in 1994. Furthermore, the second chapter briefly gave a description of the history of Christianity in Malawi, and the impact that Christianity has had on Malawi and her people, also the development and growth of Jehovah's Witness in Malawi.

Chapter three has outlined the methodology that has been used to produce this thesis paper. The methodology includes interviews and dialogue, literature, the type of research that has been applied which is qualitative research, the usage of life history and narrative approaches, the selection of participants, challenges and limitations and lastly the ethical deliberations taken into account. Chapter four is about the theories that have been used in this study, which include the theory of life history and narrative approach (Lewin, Somekh:2005), Prophetic Diakonia (Diakonia in Context:2009) and the Ecumenical Diakonia. Prophetic Diakonia shares the fundamental actuality of diakonia, affirming that the prophetic task is part of the mandate and authority that God has given the Church and its diakonia. (Diakonia in Context:2005). Ecumenical Diakonia must respond to the context situation locally or globally, Ecumenical Diakonia is a call to participate in God's Mission and Ecumenical Diakonia is transformative and justice –seeking. Finally, the theory of Freedom of Religion as a Human Right (Boyle and Sheen: 1997)

Chapter five outlined the findings of the study, which include the responses from participants; the chapter has documented the experiences of members of Jehovah's Witness as victims of religious persecutions, and the response of the churches to those persecution (silent churches).

Chapter six has analyzed the findings of the study using the theory of Prophetic diakonia, exploring the role of the churches in advocacy; the findings have shown that the churches compromised their role of being prophetic voice for the voiceless as they remained quiet in the midst of suffering. The churches sided with the oppressing powers at the time when they should have denounce the evils and announce the hope and freedom in Christ. Diakonia

therefore embraces the need to liberate humankind from everything that oppresses, enslaves, and distorts the image of God, and by doing so to open the way to salvation, in this sense liberation for salvation. (Ferguson and Ortega). But again, we have seen the churches rising up to take their place confronting the evils of the society.

In this last chapter, I shall conclude by coming back to the Research Question and see how the study has answered the research question.

## **7.2 Research Question**

Bringing back the research question, here after presenting all the findings, discussion and analysing, I shall answer the assumption and research problem of: *‘With the focus on Jehovah’s Witness, what are the historical realities experienced by the victims of religious persecution in Malawi during the period of 1964 – 1994, and which role did the church play in this situation and to what extend was that role played, and subsequent attempts of reconciliation with members Jehovah’s Witness.*

Part of the research problem was answered in chapter five using the life history and narrative approaches to understand the narrated stories; life histories allow the inquirer to introduce additional anchor points for understanding the subjective and the structural as mutual informants in understanding our own and other people’s lives. (Somekh and Lewin 2005:156). The historical experiences of victims of religious persecution in Malawi from 1964 – 1994 have been recorded showing the extent of persecution. The role that the church in Malawi played, demonstrates exclusion and indifferent, which is contrary to the theory of ecumenical diakonia, which takes place in the midst of a world of injustice, exclusion, violence and death”. (Ferguson and Ortega).

Looking at Diakonia as Prophetic voice, the churches in Malawi in general ignored those at the margin during persecution period; and together with the State, violated the freedom of religion as a human right. “A distinguishing characteristic of the freedom of religion and belief is, therefore, that it is not only capable of being violated by the state but by people who make up the state”. (Boyle and Sheen)

About an attempt of reconciliation with members of Jehovah's Witness; as much as it is important and necessary to have reconciliation; it would be a very challenging considering the structure of Jehovah's Witness who isolate themselves from other churches. The mainline churches in Malawi today are more open and they would be agreeable to discussion the topic with the Jehovah's Witness. However, the issue is more complex because the Jehovah's Witnesses believe that they went through the suffering because they are true believers in God and might not be willing to go through the process of reconciliation with other mainline churches.

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## APPENDIX A

### Informant Consent form

My name is Grenna Kaiya a student of Master's Degree in Diakon and Christian Social Practice at Diakonhjemmet University College, in Oslo Norway. As part of my studies, I am writing a thesis paper titled.

I would like to ask you some questions concerning the paper that I am writing, with your permission I would like to record our conversation, that way I do not miss out on important points, which will be very helpful to me when writing the paper.

I have read and agree with the above statement

Name:

Signature:

Date:

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Questions

1. What were your experiences with your religion during Kamuzu Banda's era?
2. Why did you choose not to buy cards?
3. How were your meetings conducted, and what were your fears?
4. What did you suffer most?
5. What were you as Jehovah's Witness doing that led to government make you as their target?
6. Is there anything else
7. When you think of what happened, how does it make you feel?
8. Is there anything that you think the government, churches can do to help you come to reconciliation with what happened to members of your faith?
9. What happened to you and your fellow Jehovah's witness member's can you give specific examples?
10. What are the things, which happened and you remember most?
11. Do you think you were accepted by the society in general or you felt discriminated?
12. What about now years later, what do you feel when you think of what happened?
13. Has your perspective changed over the years, do you think you could have acted differently
14. What is your education background
15. How old are you?
16. Are there any questions, information, or comments that you would like to add

## APPENDIX C

### Guidelines for the Interview with Churches

1. Firstly I would like to know what is your mission as the church.
2. What has been your role in speaking out for the people of Malawi, specifically the marginalised?
3. Looking back in the history of this country, there was a time when the JW members were being persecuted, did the church intervene in any way if yes why and if no why not?
4. As the church in Malawi how are the Jehovah's witnesses perceived in general?
5. Was there anything that the church could have done to prevent what happened to the members of Jehovah's Witness during Kamuzu's time?
6. What were the attempts done by your church to deal or stop the persecutions?
7. What was the response from the society as a whole?
8. What are the things that you think the church could have done differently during this time?
9. Today what is the relationship like with the Jehovah's witnesses?
10. Is there a need for forgiveness and reconciliation? From all sides, the victims, government, and the Church in Malawi
11. Do you have anything that you would like to add? In regard to the minority groups in Malawi.