

*Judith Victoria MWANDUMBA**

**CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS IN MALAWI.
THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AS AN AGENT OF POLITICAL
REFORM (FROM 1992 UNTIL PRESENT)**

Abstract: History of the church in Malawi dates way back to the colonial times, when many missionaries arrived in the country with the aim of introducing Christianity. Since then, efforts have always been made by both the state and the church to build a good working relationship and to create an environment of peaceful co-existence. While this is the case, the relations have, in some cases, been sour. The church and state are often on a collision course following the former's use of the pulpit to intrude in politics. The church has been accused of meddling in politics instead of leading "the flock" and the state often has argued that such an interference has led to civil wars in other parts of the world, including in Africa itself. Nonetheless, the church has not been swayed in its role of "speaking for the voiceless" taking a swipe at the government on the need to embark on political as well as on social reforms. The church, as the paper shows, argues that it is within its rights to comment on national issues and that the state does not have a right to "dictate" what the church should and should not do.

The Catholic Church is used in this paper as an example of how a church's influence can lead to a political reform. In March 1992, the Catholic bishops released a pastoral letter which was an open criticism of the Banda regime. The letter changed forever Malawi's political landscape. While other factors might have contributed to the political reform in the country, this paper argues that without the Roman Catholic Church and the role it played, it is not certain whether such reforms would have happened at the time and in the manner they did. Hence, the Roman Catholic Church should be seen as an important agent in Malawi's political reform.

Keywords: *Roman Catholic, Church, state, political, relations.*

* Lecturer in Political History, Mzuzu University, Malawi (jmwandumba@yahoo.com).
Danubius, XXXIII, Supliment, Galați, 2015, pp. 77-91.

INTRODUCTION

Church state relations in Malawi date way back to the colonial days¹. This period witnessed the arrival of different missionaries who established their mission stations in various parts of the country². Notable ones included the Catholic and Protestant missionaries. The church has, overtime, evolved to become part and parcel of the national history, because it is almost impossible to write about the history of Malawi without making reference to the church. Relations between the church and the state have largely been cordial. This owes to the fact that the two institutions are in service of humanity and, as such, they need to promote peaceful co-existence and a spirit of tolerance; dialogue and cooperation have, for a long time, been seen as the main pillars guiding the relations between the two. However, we need not forget the crucial role religion plays in our everyday life; hence, on a number of occasions the church, as the discussion on the Roman Catholic will show, has intervened in the affairs of the state, especially where such intervention promotes good governance, equality and the rule of law³.

This paper focuses on the church state relations in Malawi, from 1992 to present, and uses the Roman Catholic Church (herein after, RCC) as a case study. Three main arguments are stated in this paper.

Firstly, that the RCC, more than any other church in the country, was instrumental in bringing about the political reforms that took place from 1994. Secondly, that the RCC believes it is within its rights to intervene in the matters of the state for the greater good of humanity, and finally that the RCC will continue to be the “voice of the voiceless” for the foreseeable future in political and social matters, even in the face of the hostility from the state and its machinery. Thus, while the constitution of Malawi calls for the separation of church and state, the former is likely to behave to the contrary, should the need arise.

This paper is divided into four sections. The first one gives a brief overview of Malawi as a country. The second section is a brief history of the church and Christianity in Malawi, in general; thirdly the paper compares religious pluralism in Malawi, during the one party and multiparty eras; fourthly, the paper looks at the history of the RCC and its role in political and social reforms, from 1992 to present. The final section is the general conclusion.

¹ See J. Haynes, ed., *Religion, Globalization and Political Culture in the Third World* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1999).

² For an understanding of the missionary factor in Malawi, see, for instance, N.K. Mufuka, *Missions and Politics in Malawi* (Kingston, Ontario: The Limestone Press, 1977).

³ Ibid.

1. COUNTRY PROFILE

1.1. Location

Formally known as Nyasaland, during the colonial era, Malawi (also nicknamed “The Warm Heart of Africa”)⁴ is a landlocked country in Southern Africa. It is bordered by Zambia to the northwest, Tanzania to the northeast and Mozambique to the east, south and west and covers an area of over 118,000 square kilometres (45,560 sq. mi.). The country has three main regions; namely: the North, the Central and the South. Lilongwe, the capital, is Malawi’s largest city, seconded by Blantyre, then Mzuzu. In addition, Malawi has twenty-eight districts, which are spread across the three regions⁵.



Map 1: Map of Malawi showing districts and borders. Source: *World Fact Book*.

1.2. Government and Politics

Malawi has a multiparty democratic government. The country gained its independence from Britain on 6 July 1964, under the leadership of Dr. Hastings

⁴ The term “Warm heart of Africa” is usually used to portray the friendliness, the warmth and the welcoming nature of the people of Malawi.

⁵ *The World Fact Book*, 2014, accessed July 15, 2015, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>.

Kamuzu Banda, popularly referred to as the father and founder of Malawi nation⁶. Banda ruled Malawi as a one party state from 1964 to 1994. It was only in 1994 that Malawi became a democratic state. Other presidents that have ruled Malawi are: Bakili Muluzi, 1994-2004, Dr. Bingu Wa Mutharika, 2004-2012, Joyce Banda, 2012-2014⁷ and Peter Mutharika, who is the current president of Malawi. The government consists of three branches: the executive, judiciary and legislature. The presidents are elected for two to five year terms.

Presidents of Malawi, Past and Present. Source: *The World Fact Book*.



Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda
(1964-1994)



Bakili Muluzi (1994-2004)



Dr. Bingu Wa Mutharika (2004-2012)



Joyce Banda (2012-2014)

⁶ A. Gordon & D. Gordon, eds., *Understanding Contemporary Africa*, 4th ed. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006).

⁷ Joyce Banda took it over from Bingu Wa Mutharika, who died in office in April 2012. His term was to come to an end in May 2014. At the time of Bingu's death, Joyce Banda was Malawi's Vice President and, as per the requirements of the Malawi Constitution, she was sworn in as president to finish off her predecessor's term.



Peter Mutharika (since 31 May 2014)

1.3. Population, ethnic groups and languages

Malawi has a population of about 17 million people⁸ and is the home to diverse ethnic groups such as Chewa, Lomwe, Yao, Ngoni, Tumbuka, Nyanja, Sena, Tonga and Ngonde⁹. The Chewa make up the largest ethnic group in Malawi. The country's official language is English and Chichewa (language of the Chewa) is widely and commonly spoken across the country¹⁰.

1.4. Economy

Malawi is rated among the least developed but also heavily populated countries of the world¹¹. Its economy is largely agriculture dependent and agriculture accounts for almost 90% of the country's exports¹². Among some of its major export crops are tobacco (the country's major foreign exchange), tea, coffee, cotton groundnuts and sugarcane. For a long time, the country has relied on financial aid from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and individual countries that have bilateral ties with Malawi, such as Britain, Norway, United States of America (USA), Canada, just to mention a few. A number of political and social problems combined have slowed the rate of economic growth

⁸ *The World Fact Book*, July 2014 estimates.

⁹ B. Pachai, *Malawi: The history of the nation* (London: Longman, 1973).

¹⁰ The various ethnic groups have their languages as well, but Chichewa is the dominant local language.

¹¹ See *The World Fact Book*, 2014.

of the country¹³; however, political leaders in recent years have reiterated the need to embark on policies that ensure economic growth and development¹⁴.

2. RELIGION IN MALAWI

2.1 The spread of Islam and Christianity

History of religion and of the church in Malawi dates back to pre-colonial days; during this time, many people practiced traditional forms of religion¹⁵. However, the arrival of the missionaries from the mid-19th century led to the introduction of Christianity and Islam in the country¹⁶. Many of the coming missionaries viewed traditional religion as a form of pagan worship; hence they tried to convert as many people as possible to Christianity or Islam. Some of the first missions to arrive were the Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland, the Universities Mission to Central Africa and the Dutch Reformed Church¹⁷. These were a combination of Presbyterians and Protestants. Catholic missionaries also opened up mission stations in the country. The first Catholic missionaries were the White Fathers and the Montfort missionaries¹⁸.

Early missionaries mostly focused on the 3c's (Christianity, Commerce, Civilisation). The church and the state strived to established cordial relations; hence they promoted peaceful co-existence, and a spirit of tolerance¹⁹. However, this was later to change. With the passing of time, they also started criticizing the governments who were ill-treating their people. It should also be noted that during the colonial era, some churches run by black people became very critical of the oppressive governments. A notable case is John Chilembwe, a Malawian who headed the Providence Industrial Mission in Chiladzulu²⁰. He led an uprising in

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Politically bad economic policies implemented by leaders, mismanagement of donor funds, massive corruption in the government and public sectors and the HIV-AIDS pandemic have really slowed down any meaningful progress, economic growth and development.

¹⁴ Among other things, leaders are committed to implement World Bank and IMF rules, which call for fiscal discipline.

¹⁵ J. McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi, 1875-1940. The Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province* (Cambridge University Press, 1977).

¹⁶ B. Sundkler & C. Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge University Press 2000): 468.

¹⁷ Ibid., 469.

¹⁸ K.N. Mufuka, *Missions and Politics in Malawi* (Kingston, Ontario: The Limestone Press 1977).

¹⁹ McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi, 1875-1940*.

²⁰ Chiladzulu is one of the districts in the Southern region of Malawi.

January 1915 (called the Chilembwe uprising) against the British government, in protest of their ill-treatment of black Nyasas²¹. Though not successful, the uprising remains an important case of a church speaking out against the state. To this day, the church and religion in general remain an important part of Malawi's history and politics and the country proudly calls itself a "God fearing Nation".

Today we have the following percentages²²:

- Christians – over 70%
- Muslims – 20%
- Other – 5%
- None – 2%

So, Christianity is the major religion in Malawi and Catholics make up the largest Christian group, seconded by the Church of Central African Presbyterian (CCAP). CCAP is the biggest Protestant group. Other denominations in Malawi include Anglicans, Baptists, Evangelicals, Jews, Hindu, Baha'i and Rastafarians²³.

2.2 Religious Pluralism in Malawi

For us to better understand the religious pluralism in Malawi, it is important to consider both past and present political environments, as they have been very instrumental in shaping the dynamics of religious pluralism in the country. In doing this, we look at how the issue of religious pluralism was handled during the one party era and the multiparty democratic era.

2.1.1 Religious pluralism in Malawi during the one party era, 1964-1994

During this period there was a heavy interference of the state in religion and religious affairs, in general. The state had tight control over religion and churches and one can argue that religious freedom was almost missing²⁴. Churches whose teachings ran contrary to government policies were persecuted and faced the wrath of the state. A good example in this point are the Jehovah's Witnesses who were banned from practicing their faith in Malawi because, among other things,

²¹ The country was called Nyasaland during the colonial period and Nyasa was a term used to refer to a native. J. Liffé, *Africans: The History of a Continent* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²² These are the 2013 estimates (source: *The World Fact Book*).

²³ B.L. Gama, *The role of the Church in politics in Malawi* (South Africa: AcadSA Publishing, 2010).

²⁴ S. Gibbs and D. Ajulu, "The Role of the Church in Advocacy: Case Studies from Southern and Eastern Africa," 1999, INTRAC occasional paper, accessed on 09 July 2014, <http://www.intrac.org/data/files/resources/55/OPS-31-The-Role-of-the-Church-in-Advocacy.pdf>.

they refused to buy party membership cards²⁵. The state embarked on a systematic campaign to rid Malawi of this religious group; they were imprisoned, their property confiscated, their houses and prayer halls burned and some were even killed with many more seeking refuge in neighboring Zambia and Mozambique²⁶. Apart from Jehovah's witnesses, other churches that were critical to the government and its policies also suffered a similar fate. These developments instilled fear in the minds of various religious groups in Malawi, as they practiced their faiths in an environment characterized by intimidation and oppression. Another interesting thing to note is that, while other countries talked openly of atheism (in USA for example), it was a taboo to do this in Malawi, during this period. Malawi calls itself "a God fearing nation", hence atheism was never tolerated by the state.

2.1.2 Religious pluralism in Malawi during the Multiparty era 1994-present

Since 1994, the state has taken on a more pluralistic attitude towards religion. This has been made possible in part because of the new Constitution, which was adopted in 1994. The Constitution of the Republic of Malawi provides freedom of religion. Chapter IV, section 33 of the Constitution, regarding the freedom of conscience reads "every person has the right to conscience, religion, belief and to academic freedom"²⁷. This implies that people in Malawi have the right to belong to any religious group, of their choice, and cannot be victimized or discriminated against on religious grounds²⁸. This has led to the birth of several churches in recent years mostly Pentecostals. It was also at this point that the Jehovah's Witnesses, who had been banned by the Banda regime, started practicing their faith again²⁹. As one writer puts it, "one of Bakili Muluzi's first acts as president (of democratic Malawi) was to allow back, to religious practice and freedom in Malawi, the Jehovah's Witnesses who had been banned by the preceding Malawi Congress Party Government"³⁰. Generally speaking, there is a peaceful co-existence of the churches, though at times pockets of intolerance

²⁵ The Banda regime applied a number of policies e.g. buying party membership cards and attending party functions. The Jehovah's Witnesses refused to do any of this because of their faith. K. Ross, ed., *Political Theology of Power for the new Malawi*, Kachere Monograph, no. 3 (Blantyre: Claim, 1996).

²⁶ Ross, *Political Theology of Power for the new Malawi*, 113.

²⁷ Constitution of Malawi, 1994.

²⁸ T. Cullen, *Malawi: a Turning Point* (Edinburgh: Pentland Press, 1994).

²⁹ P. Gifford, ed., *The Christian Churches and the Democratization of Africa* (Leiden - New York Brill, 1995).

³⁰ T. Likambale, "Atupele Muluzi supports religious pluralism in Malawi," *Nyasa Times*, online publication, April 6, 2014, accessed July 15, 2014, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/>.

exist³¹. Relations between the church and state have been both good and sour. At times, the state has accused the church of meddling in politics instead of leading “the flock”, while the church has argued that it is within its rights to comment on national issues – specifically those affecting the lives of ordinary Malawians and that the state does not have a right to “dictate” what the church should and should not do³².

It can be concluded that the leaders that came after 1994 were determined to improve religious pluralism in the country. The following section examines the role of the Roman Catholic Church, as far as the political reform in Malawi is concerned.

3. THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE POLITICAL REFORM IN MALAWI

Gifford argues that the Catholic bishops have been crucial in the political reforms, especially in many African countries. He mentions countries such as Benin, Gabon, Togo, Congo, Madagascar and Zambia, as some of the countries whose political history has been influenced and shaped by the RCC. In general he contends that churches play vital roles in education, health, development and politics. Specifically, he argues that “this has involved challenging political structures, urging reform, advocating political change and even presiding over the change itself”³³. The story in Malawi is no different and, as the following sections will show, the RCC in Malawi has been and remains part and parcel of Malawi’s political history. The first Catholic missionaries arrived in Malawi in 1889 (Episcopal Conference of Malawi). Reverend Dr. Methurin Guilleme was their first bishop and, by 1910, the RCC had established itself as the largest single church in the country³⁴. During the early days, the RCC focused mainly on evangelism, on converting the local people to Christianity, but with the passing of time, the church started focusing on other social issues, for instance the provision of good education and health care. To this end, the RCC built and opened a number

³¹ In very rare cases, minor tensions erupted. For instance, there was an incident that happened in Mangochi (one of the districts in the Southern region of Malawi). This region has a large group of Muslims. One day, a few Muslim men went into a market place and confiscated pork meat from some guys (not Muslim) who were selling it. In the days following this incident, they started talking of Mangochi being an “Islamic state” and of not allowing the sale of pork in the area. This act was heavily condemned by both Muslims and non-Muslims.

³² For this kind of discussion, see, for instance, M. Schofeller, *In search for the truth: Confrontation between the Church and State in Malawi*, Kachere Book 8 (Blantyre: Claim, 2004).

³³ Gifford, *The Christian Churches and the Democratization of Africa*, 3.

³⁴ Mufuka, *Missions and Politics in Malawi*, 38.

of schools and hospitals. However, Gifford argues that it was not long before the church became the “voice of the voiceless”, speaking on behalf of the people on the myriad of problems affecting them. The biggest impact of the church was in March 1992, when the Roman Catholic bishops released their first ever pastoral letter, in which they bluntly criticized the Banda regime and its policies. This letter became very instrumental in the political changes that took place in 1994. What led the Catholic bishops to defy the odds and write this letter, given the brutality of the Banda regime? To answer this question, we need to understand first and foremost the political situation in Malawi and the type of rule Banda had put in place, prior to 1992.

3.1 Roman Catholics under Dr. Banda Regime (1964-1994)

Malawi gained independence from Britain on 6 July 1964. With the passing of time, Dr. Banda introduced a one party system and declared all other opposition parties illegal. His one party rule was one of the most repressive and dictatorial in Africa³⁵. Detention without trial, torture, assassination of the political opponents and suppression of the dissenting views were the major characteristics of Banda regime³⁶. The rule of law did not apply in the country. In 1971, he declared himself president for life and soon it became clear that it would be very hard to remove him from power. People were denied of their basic freedoms, but due to the brutal nature of the regime, there was little people could do to oppose this. Economically, there was abject poverty and the gap between the rich and the poor was just too wide³⁷. In addition, Banda formed two national youth organizations; the Malawi Young Pioneers (which was a paramilitary group) and the Youth League (a political wing of the sole governing party)³⁸. These two bodies became instruments of control and coercion and were greatly feared³⁹. There was a system of compulsory party membership so that every person was forced to buy party membership cards. The Youth League was used to “check the possession of party cards and the compulsory attendance at party meetings”⁴⁰. The MYP and the Youth League could also be deployed as spies in public places, drinking places and even in churches or in any social gathering, with the intention of collecting any

³⁵ P.J. Schraeder, *African Politics and Society: A Mosaic in Transformation*, Thomson, Wadworth, 1999.

³⁶ Haynes, *Religion, Globalization and Political Culture in the Third World*.

³⁷ Gibbs, Ajulu, “The Role of the Church in Advocacy: Case Studies from Southern and Eastern Africa.”

³⁸ Haynes, *Religion, Globalization and Political Culture in the Third World*, 170.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

form of dissenting views regarding Banda, his party and his leadership. As Haynes rightly argues “the youth groups and their related secret bodies had become so effective that, by the end of the 1980s, Malawi had turned into one of the most supervised countries in Africa. State power was represented in almost every corner of society through an intricate network of informants, training camps, teachers, roadblocks and checkpoints”⁴¹.

Therefore, we can understand the desperate situation Malawians found themselves in and, given these characteristics of the Banda regime, it was almost impossible to criticize him. Nevertheless, as the winds of political change started blowing across Africa, following the end of the Cold War, a number of authoritarian regimes began to crumble⁴². The question remains however, did they crumble by themselves? No. There were forces at work and, in many cases (including Malawi), the church emerged as the biggest force. This argument does not, in any way, overlook the crucial role other forces, like civil society organizations, played in bringing down Banda’s regime. However, we need not forget that civil society organizations were tightly controlled and hence had little room to maneuver. The church, on the other hand, enjoyed some sort of legitimacy and therefore used this status to spread the message of reform to the people. Supporting the view that the church (RCC) was instrumental in Banda’s downfall, Gibbs&Ajulu wrote “whilst the late 1980s and early 1990s saw the beginnings of dissent against his government’s policies by various individuals and groups, it was the Malawian Catholic bishops’ pastoral letter issued on 8th March 1992 which is widely thought to have signaled the beginning of the end for the regime”⁴³. Thus, the role of the church, especially the RCC, in the political reforms cannot be overlooked. It can be argued therefore that “at the time of the end of the Cold War, Africa experienced the beginning of a second liberation, as the peoples of Africa tried to throw off the political systems that had increasingly oppressed and beggared them. The struggle was not the same everywhere, but one of its common features was the significant role played by the churches”⁴⁴. Thus, the above mentioned characteristics of Banda regime are some of the factors that forced the Roman Catholic bishops to issue the pastoral letter⁴⁵.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² During the Cold War (1945-1989), a number of authoritarian regimes in Africa still enjoyed the support of either the USA or USSR who were on a campaign to spread capitalism and communism respectively.

⁴³ Ajulu Gibbs, „The Role of the Church in Advocacy: Case Studies from Southern and Eastern Africa,” 56.

⁴⁴ Gifford, *The Christian Churches and the Democratization of Africa*, 1.

⁴⁵ For a though discussion of these other factors see J. Newell, “A moment of truth? The Church and Political Change in Malawi, 1992,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 33, 2 (1995).

3.2 The 1992 Pastoral Letter

Released on 8th March 1992 and read in all Catholic churches, the pastoral letter marked the beginning of the open dissent against Banda's regime in Malawi. The RCC became the first institution to speak formally and "openly" against the ills of the one party regime. Titled "Living our Faith" the letter was the begging of a complete change for the future and destiny of the Malawians and their politics. The relations between the RCC and the Banda regime were severely strained. The Catholic Bishops (the architects of the letter) were imprisoned and faced death threats. The letter opened people's eyes and fostered in them the need to break free and reclaim their freedoms. What is more, "when the government started to react harshly and violently to the demands for democracy and to the writers and bearers of the Lenten Letter, it sparked off unprecedented demonstrations by secondary school and university students in Malawi's main cities, in defense of the newly won freedoms"⁴⁶. There were protests everywhere, when, for the first time, Malawians realized that they could actually protest against the "mighty" Banda⁴⁷. In response, the government engaged its machinery to intimidate people and to ban the pro-referendum protests but this did not help. International and local pressure forced president Banda to call for a referendum and, on 14 June 1993, the majority of the Malawians voted tremendously for a multiparty system of government.

At this point, it is important to mention that once the pastoral letter was released, other churches came out to support the RCC. A good example is the case of the Presbyterian churches, that joined the Catholic bishops in calling for political reform. However, there were also other churches who did the contrary. For instance, the Nkhoma synod⁴⁸, where Banda was a church elder, continued to support his regime⁴⁹. Despite the intimidation by the state machinery, the churches in Malawi came together and formed an organization called the Public Affairs Committee which was an umbrella body for the churches and opposition groups that were slowly surfacing in the country. Further international and local pressure forced Banda to set up a Presidential Committee on Dialogue (PCD) and it is this committee that held talks with PAC until an understanding was reached, to hold a

⁴⁶ Ibid., 253.

⁴⁷ During demonstrations people were chanting, in Chichewa language, "zisinthe, zisinthe", meaning "we want change, we want change".

⁴⁸ Nkhoma synod is one of the three synods of the Presbyterian Church of Central African (CCAP); the other two are Blantyre synod, in the Southern region of Malawi, and Livingstonia synod, in the North.

⁴⁹ Haynes, *Religion, Globalization and Political Culture in the Third World*.

referendum, in 1993, and, eventually, multiparty general elections on 17th of May 1994⁵⁰.

Why is the Catholic Church singled out as being an agent of change in Malawi's political reform? As it has been discussed elsewhere in the paper, it was the first time that such open opposition was made against the Banda regime. This is not to say that people never resented Banda's rule; they did but they could not dare to voice out this resentment, given the brutality that characterized the one party state. The Catholic bishops knew that, by releasing that letter, they were putting their lives on the line, but they went ahead. In addition, once the letter was read, there was no turning back, it opened the doors even for those organizations and pressure groups that were still hiding in their cocoons to come out in the open. I argue here that the political reform in Malawi needed a stimulus and the RCC, with its pastoral letter, became that stimulus. Of course, others have argued that the political change would still have come to Malawi one way or the other⁵¹. This paper only argues that the RCC hastened the pace of this change and the manner in which it happened. There is no denying of the fact that the RCC led the way and others followed.

Today, the RCC continues to be the "voice of the voiceless" in political and social matters and criticizes government, where need be. Pastoral letters still remain the preferred method of not only criticizing government and holding it to account, but also of communicating to the people a number of issues affecting the country. In the run-up to the elections of May 2014, the RCC joined several other groups in educating people on the need to vote and the qualities to look for when choosing a leader. In addition, there are a number of organizations run by the RCC such as the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) and the Catholic Development Commission in Malawi (CADECOM), just to mention a few. CCJP is mostly involved in politically related issues while CADECOM takes on a more social approach, on issues related to development. Thus, it can be argued that, through these organizations, the RCC keeps track of the developments happening in Malawi, political as well as social, and gives its voice when the need to do so arises.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the paper argues that the church has been an important player in the political reform in Africa, as a whole, and in Malawi, in particular.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ See, for instance, the arguments by B.L. Gama, "The relationship between Church and State: A Theologically based investigation into the social doctrine of the Church in Malawi," unpublished MA Thesis.

The RCC has been and remains an important part of Malawi's history. The 1992 pastoral letter opened the doors to active protests against the Banda regime, which eventually crumbled. While other organizations helped in bringing the Banda regime down, it was the RCC that took the crucial and most dangerous step – that of openly criticizing the president, a thing which had never happened in Malawi prior to 1992. After the pastoral letter, Malawians never looked back, until the Banda regime was removed. Today the RCC still continues its social roles, being a provision of good education as well as health care, and it also remains the “voice of the voiceless”, as far as political reform is concerned.

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