

George James: Pioneer Seventh-day Adventist Missionary to Malawi, 1893-1894

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This paper examines the brief but nevertheless important story of George James, the first Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) missionary who set foot in present-day Malawi in 1893, and where a decade later (1902) Malamulo, the church's earliest flagship mission station in all Africa was established (Matemba 2002:1). What is remarkable about James is that not only was he a recent SDA convert who self-sponsored his missionary work to Malawi, but also that he was representing what at that time was a little-known USA-based evangelical denomination with roots to the 1830s apocalyptic Millerite movement (Hoeschele 2004:11). In Malawi, the British colonial government would later unfairly mischaracterize the church as a "nondescript" religious movement bent on unsettling the "native" mind, apparently because of its premillennial teachings, strict adherence to the Seventh-day Sabbath, and eschatological beliefs, including remnant ecclesiology (Shepperson and Price 1987:328-330). Despite James' pioneer missionary status in Africa, his story has received cursory attention in the discourse, and in cases where information about him exist, there are factual discrepancies and often the narrative is presented uncritically. Although James' activities during his short missionary sojourn did not result in the direct establishment of the SDA church in Malawi, his story is significant in two ways. First, it provides an important starting point towards a critical understanding of the earliest SDA missionary attempts to evangelize Africa. Second, while the narrative is set within the narrow confines of a single missionary from a historically "smaller" evangelical church (Fiedler 1995:31, 32), it highlights the difficulties and personal sacrifices pioneer missionaries faced in the early years of Christian evangelization of Africa.

Introduction

On 28 August 1993 the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Malawi gathered at the BAT stadium in Blantyre (a similar event was held in Lilongwe, Malawi's capital city a week earlier) to celebrate a century of the church's work in Malawi (Malawi Union 1993a:1; Folkenberg 1993:1, 2). For the occasion, the church printed a special calico with the words *Zaka 100 M'Malawi: Seventh-day Adventists Serving Malawi, 1893-1993: Physical, Mental and Spiritual*. On the cloth was also depicted an image resembling Christ descending from heaven with the words *adzabweranso* (will come again) written below it. On the front cover of the event booklet was depicted a figure of Christ descending from heaven with the words *tayandikira kwathu* (we are heaven bound) written underneath it. A special item on the program was the dramatization of George James' missionary story (Malawi Union 1993b:1, 2).

Many who took prominent roles at the function were *crème de la crème* crop of influential pastors and church leaders of the post-missionary era, which began in the early 1970s and culminated in the appointment of Pastor Frank Botomani in 1980 as the first African president of the entire SDA Church in Malawi. Among the church luminaires—sadly all now deceased—were Pastors D. J. Kika, D. W. Kapitao, E. J. Zintambila, F. A. Botomani, I. J. Nchambalinja, S. M. Samuel and A. J. C. Nazombe (Malawi Union 1993a:1). Reflecting on the event, it was stated that "we are gathered here to celebrate God's acts among His people during the hundred years since the arrival of George James on March 8, 1893 in Blantyre. . . . May we be challenged by those who gave all for God's sake. Ask God to help us finish the work by making use of the talents He has given us" (Malawi Union 1993a:1).

By selecting the period 1893-1993 the church perhaps erred in implying that its work in Malawi started in 1893 as was stated erroneously in the commemoration program that the church had gathered “to celebrate 100 years of Seventh-day Adventist presence in the heart of Africa” (Folkenberg 1993:4). The official beginning of the SDA church in Malawi was in 1902 when Joseph Booth (a Baptist missionary from the UK) and Thomas Branch (the first Black American to set foot in Central Africa and for the SDA church, the first Black American missionary in Africa), established the Malamulo Mission (see Shepperson and Price 1987:135; Langworthy 1996:161-173). The centenary celebration of Malamulo took place on 15 September 2002, attended by Bakili Muluzi, Malawi’s President from 1994-2004 (see Matemba 2002:1; Ng’ombe 2002:3).

This paper draws on an array of primary sources (church documents, archival materials and unpublished sources) and secondary materials (published articles and books) collected for a large study, which I am preparing for publication as the first full-length history of the SDA Church in Malawi. As far as available sources could allow, the present paper presents a detailed account of George James, a young British independent and self-sponsored missionary whose brief missionary activity (1893-1894) made him the first SDA in the whole of Central, Eastern, and Western Africa.

Yet until now, James’ story has been largely unfamiliar to SDA members particularly in Africa, where church historians are beginning to document the contribution of pioneer missionaries, church leaders, and local pastors, to fill the missing gaps in the teaching of church history in SDA theological seminaries on the continent (see Hoeschele 2007:7-8; Matemba 1997:23-24; Sokupa 2015:171-172). The paper seeks to correct some of the factual errors in extant sources where James’ story appears related to who he was, when he arrived in Malawi, and when he died. In some of the sources James is identified as a Black American missionary (erroneously confusing him with Thomas Branch) and other sources saying that he died in 1892 while going back home. Further, that he worked in present-day Malawi for three or five years, and still other sources, which place the date of his arrival in Malawi as 1891, two years before he actually arrived in the country (see Khanje 1972:2; Cripps 1971:5; Folkenberg 1993:4; Doss 1993:18).

Earliest SDA Missionary Outreach in Africa

In this section, I sketch out the earliest SDA missionary outreach in Africa to provide the necessary context to George James’ missionary attempts in Malawi from 1893 to 1894. In SDA Church historiography, James’ missionary story falls within the wider discourse of the Church’s earliest evangelical outreach outside the USA after the Church was founded on 2 May 1863 (Spalding 1962:7; Schwarz 1979:93-97). While aspects of the Church’s earliest missionary activities, particularly to Europe from 1874 onwards have received attention (Knight 2000: 140-141; Schwarz 1979: 142-149), the African details have not been fully explored (see Pfeiffer 1985:13; Hoeschele 2007:7-8; Matemba 2004:25-26). It is therefore necessary, as a background to James’ pioneer missionary activities in Malawi, to highlight the historical aspects of Seventh-day Adventist’s earliest penetration in Africa, from the northernmost parts of the continent in Egypt (1878), to its southernmost parts in South Africa (1885) and relevant movements in between.

Although today Africans comprise the largest SDA membership worldwide (41 percent of 20.7 million worldwide membership in 2017) (General Conference 2018), the evangelization of Africa had a delayed start when the SDA Church began to expand outside the USA from 1874 onwards. Lack of operational funds and indeed experienced missionaries made it impossible for the church to undertake wholesale missiological expansion. Until the establishment of a Foreign

Missions Board in 1889, the church did not have a clear mission strategy for expansion into other continents as Stefan Höschele has observed that “whereas Adventist mission before this period was more like a random exercise that consisted in responding to calls from outside” (Höschele 2004:16). In any case, between 1874 and 1890, the church placed most of its available missionaries in Europe. Apart from John N. Andrews who went to Switzerland in 1874, others like Abram LaRue were in China by 1887 (Schwarz 1979:138-147).

As noted below, around the same time, missionaries like D. A. Robinson and others were in South Africa at the invitation of local believers (Matemba 1997:23). For her part, Ellen White, the church’s spiritual leader, was herself serving as a missionary in Europe (1885-1887), including visits to England, France, Switzerland, Germany, Scandinavia, Italy, and also between 1891 and 1900, with her son William, working as a missionary in Australia, New Zealand, and Tasmania (Herndon 1960:12ff). During that time, the church had taken the decision to give preference to countries with strong economies such as England, Germany, and Australia, with the hope that once the church was established in those countries that through them, Africa would be evangelized. Another reason for the delay to enter Africa concerns the fact that by 1890, for example, the church was only twenty-seven years old and as such, the home base itself was in need of heavy spending to establish its institutions (Pfeiffer 1985:12).

The policies of the church during the time when Arthur G. Daniels (1901-1922) and William A. Spicer (1922-1930) were presidents of the worldwide church did much to promote the church’s missiological expansion. During their respective tenures, the two leaders were convinced that the time had come for the expansion of the church into unreached territories. Spicer’s work in India, for example, left such a lasting impression that an Adventist university is named after him. A.G. Daniels also promoted the idea of missionary expansion such that a year after assuming office, sixty new missionaries left the United States and thereafter, on average, ninety followed each year (Schwarz 1979:354-355).

Africa benefited from this emphasis in missiological expansion because by 1900 a number of areas on the continent had been reached with the SDA message. Although Egypt was first entered in 1878 and South Africa in 1885, Adventism did not expand further from those bases into the rest of Africa until much later. The *official* entry into Malawi was not because of the expansion of the work in South Africa or Egypt but rather because of the influence of Joseph Booth. Booth encouraged the Adventist Church to purchase a Seventh-day Baptist mission at Plainfield in Thyolo in southern Malawi, which became known as Malamulo mission under SDA control from 1902 onwards (Langworthy 1996:161-173; Matemba 2002:1, 2).

The northern region of Africa was the first to be entered when SDA missionaries from Europe introduced the message to the Italian European population in Alexandria in 1878. The fact that European SDAs were pioneers in this development indicates the success of the Adventist evangelization in Europe since J. N. Andrews went to Switzerland in 1874. Egyptian society, deep-rooted in the Islamic faith and tradition, proved difficult to penetrate. During the anti-western uprisings under Colonel Arabi Pasha in 1881, leaders of the small mission were massacred and the remaining few members scattered. It was not until 1901 that a second and more successful attempt was made to enter Egypt when Ludwing Richard Conradi (1856-1939) established the SDA Church there in 1901 and a year later, formed the Oriental Union Mission (Pfeiffer 1985:14-19).

After Egypt in the north, the earliest known entry of the SDA Church in Southern Africa was in 1885 in the town of Kimberly, South Africa through William Hunt. Hunt, an American, was a mineral prospector who had lived in Australia for some time before moving to the bustling diamond mine of Kimberly in South Africa (Matemba 1997:23; Schwarz 1979:223, 224). In Kimberly, he began to share the SDA message aided by Adventist literature he always carried. Among the first people interested in the Adventist message were Peter Wessels and G. J. van

Drutten (Ogouma, Edmond, Amouzou, and Abib 2017:46-47). Another version of the story suggests that Wessels and van Drutten, both farmers in the area, already knew about the Sabbath and other Adventist beliefs by the time that Hunt arrived in South Africa. According to this version, Wessels, a Christian, noted that the Bible advocated baptism by immersion and that the true Sabbath was Saturday and not Sunday (see Herndon 1960). When he asked his deacon about this, he was told that such things were not important, and although disappointed, he persuaded his family to keep the true Sabbath and later persuaded, van Drutten, his neighbor, regarding this spiritual truth (Ogouma et al. 2017:45-46).

Thus, on the Transvaal in South Africa, a small group of farmers began keeping the *Seventh Day*, completely unaware that in America a new church was in existence with Sabbath observance as one of its main pillars of belief. When the small group met Hunt, they realised that they had not been alone in this belief (Spalding 1962:9). By the beginning of 1887, SDA believers had grown to forty around the mining town. Hunt, Drutten, Wessels, and others decided to request the General Conference (GC), headquarters of the church based America, for gospel workers and collected a contribution of money amounting to US \$8900 which was sent to the GC (Matemba 1997: 23). The GC could hardly believe a request of this nature from a part of the world they had not officially entered, and immediately the GC sent a group of missionaries who arrived in Cape Town in July 1887, including D.A. Robinson (leader), C.L. Boyd, their families and two colporteurs, George Burleigh and R.S. Anthony (Matemba, 1997:23; Ogouma et al, 2017:46).

The southern penetration led to the official beginnings of the church in several countries. Led by Fred Sparrow, Zimbabwe was entered in 1894 when Solusi Mission near Bulawayo was established (Spalding 1962:21). Lesotho was the next field in the south to be reached. There in 1894 a migrant labourer from Lesotho working in South Africa named David Kalaka was converted at a camp meeting held in the mining town of Kimberley that was conducted by Steven N. Haskell (1833–1922), one of the leading figures in the church of his time. Together with Kalaka, Haskell started SDA work in Lesotho when Emmanuel Mission was established in 1896 (Nteso 1997:3-4). In 1905, missionary William H. Anderson pioneered the establishment of the church in Zambia when Rusangu Mission was opened among the Bemba people (BNA S 18/6: archive). In 1920, William Anderson opened a mission and a school in the northern part of Namibia in the Caprivi Strip in Chief Chikamatonda's area (BNA S152/5: archive). Two years later, William Anderson began SDA work in Botswana when they built a hospital among BaNgwaketse in Kanye m(Matemba 1997:26-27) while Swaziland was entered in 1920 through the work of Joseph N. Hlubi and missionary Cyrus Rogers (Masuku 1996:64-65). In 1924, William Anderson also pioneered SDA work in Angola (Matemba 1997:24).

The West Coast of Africa was entered in the mid-1890s. In 1894, E. L. Sanford and R. G. Rudolph entered Ghana but were soon driven back by fever. Another attempt in 1903 by D.U. Hale was again short-lived when Hale left due to ill health (Owusu-Mensa 1993:60-61). Later in 1906, the work in Ghana was merged with the work in Sierra Leone when D.C. Babcock and other missionaries entered the area. The work in Ghana and Sierra Leone expanded to Liberia in 1927 when a group of African-Americans under G. Nathaniel Banks established a mission there (Nortey 1990:180-181).

The beginnings of the SDA work in north and east Africa was dominated by European missionaries while the work in west, south and central Africa American missionaries dominated the field. The work started by L.R. Conradi in Egypt finally reached East Africa at the beginning of 1900. The first country to be entered was Tanzania and it was the work of German missionaries that pioneered the work there (Hoeschele 2007:54). The German missionary interest in Tanzania was mainly for the fact that Germany had colonized Tanzania in 1885 and small wonder that more German funds and missionaries (both SDA and other Protestant churches)

were available for missionary outreach there. In 1903 Johan Ehlers and an American-German nurse, A.C. Enns, established Pare Mission (Hoeschele 2007:54-55). In 1906, Peter Nyambo, from Malawi, joined Enns in Tanzania. Together with Enns, Nyambo went to Kenya where they surveyed a place in Gendia near Kisumu as a suitable place for a mission, and when the Canadian SDA missionary Arthur Grandville Carscallen arrived, Nyambo accompanied him and co-established Gendia Mission (Pfeiffer 1985:28; Matamba, 2004:35-42).

Finally, in 1907, SDA missionaries from Scandinavia, Paul N. Lindgren and J. Persson, started the work first in Eritrea before it spread to Ethiopia. Work in these countries had a slow start and it was not until 1909 that the Italian governor in Ethiopia allowed SDA missionaries to build a church (Spalding 1962:9). However, the attempts by the church to establish medical work in Ethiopia was unsuccessful, forcing Adventist missionary-physicians to relocate to Tanzania (Pfeiffer 1985:27-28).

Early life and conversion

We know little about the background of George James due to insufficient sources on his early life. What limited information we have however, is that he was born in 1860 in the UK and grew up in the city of London. From the aspects of his early life available, James did not grow up a Christian and spent much of his youth in the pubs and streets of London entertaining people with his violin (TARSH 1893:518; AHC 1952:4). Little did James know that this ‘unholy’ instrument would be used for the propagation of the word of God far away from his home and his people into uncharted parts of Africa. Unsatisfied with his life, in the mid-1880s James migrated to America where after attending an SDA camp meeting he accepted the Three Angels messageⁱ and subsequently was baptised into the membership of the church (Cripps 1971:5; Malawi Union 1993b:1).

With a desire to deepen his faith so that he could “give the truth to others” (AHC 1952:3), James enrolled at Battle Creek College (today Andrews University, the church’s flagship higher education institution) in the State of Michigan. Battle Creek was a spiritual watershed for James. In a communication with the Foreign Missions Board, an SDA department then responsible for evangelism outside the USA, James’ spiritual transformation can be revealed. He stated:

God has been so good to me! Just a short time ago, I was lost in darkness, playing my violin in the bars of London. Somehow, God led me here to America. Then He led me into an evangelistic meeting where I studied the Bible and gave my heart to Christ. My time here at Battle Creek College has deepened my knowledge of the Bible and my love for God (Malawi Union 1993b:1).

While undertaking his studies, “the burden in his heart ... was for the great heathen lands” to take the Christian message to Central Africa as a missionary (AHC 1952:3). It was a part of Africa James had heard about of the *unfinished* missionary work of Dr. David Livingstone, the Scottish medical-missionary whose work in the 1850s and 1860s opened up much of East, Central and Southern Africa to European Christian work, and later British imperialism (see, for example, Ross 2002:14).

James was convinced of his *call* and had ‘a great desire to reach the native of the interior’ (MMA 1977:2). Towards the end of 1892, James approached the Foreign Mission’s Board (a missionary department for the church established 1889) “that he might be sent to Africa as a missionary to the heathen ... [for the Foreign Mission Board]... this was something new [and] was not prepared to open up such work” (AHC 1952:3). In its reply to James the board explained that “... why not stay here at Battle Creek College for a few years, finish your studies, gain some experience, perhaps get married, and then something could open up for you” (Malawi Union

1993b:1). Although others have noted that “the economy did not permit the brethren to accept his offer [as missionary to Africa]” (Cripps 1971:5), the fact he was new in the SDA faith—having only been baptised a couple of years previously—might have weakened his case (Malawi Union. 1993b:2). The SDA church like any denomination, was particular with its image, and therefore could not *risk* its reputation by sending an unmarried young man who was recently converted and with no missionary experience into a virgin missionary territory.

Another key factor worth considering is that in the early days, the leadership of the church was generally reluctant to evangelise outside the USA and such tended to ignore even those among its membership who wanted to venture on their own for the church (Oliver and Knight nd:np). Part of the problem is that until the church established a dedicated missionary department in 1889, it did not have a clear missionary policy to evangelise outside USA. Undeterred by the failure of the church to support him, James left his studies, sold his possessions, packed necessary goods (including his violin), bought a steamship ticket and sailed for Malawi, Central Africa (AHC 1952:4; Koester 1994:13).

Arrival in Malawi

The trip from the Battle Creek, USA, to present-day Malawi, Central Africa took James to Cape Town where he arrived at the beginning of January 1893 and sought the company of the local SDA congregation he had heard about while at Battle Creek (Doss 1993:17; Matemba 1997:24). Members of the Cape Town congregation told James of their chance encounter, in February 1892, with one Joseph Booth who had since gone up north to central Africa and set up a mission in an area “beyond the habitation of white men” and in present-day Malawi (Langworthy 1996:28).ⁱⁱ Of significance about this meeting was that the Cape Town members introduced Booth for the first time ‘... to the idea that the true Sabbath is the seventh and not the first day of the week’ (Shepperson and Price 1987:119) – an issue that would linger during Booth’s missionary career, and subsequently influenced his own mission policy.

For James, an interesting coincidence was that the area Dr David Livingstone talked about in his writings and where James wanted to go was the same area Booth had set up his mission. Following Booth’s missionary trail, James left Cape Town for present-day Malawi on 21 January 1893. James travelled to Durban on a six-day journey on the ship *SS Hawarden Castele* (TARSH 1893:518). In Durban, he boarded another ship that took him to the mouth of the Zambezi River in Mozambique at Chinde, where an arduous journey taking him to Malawi via the Shire River, begun. For £10 he secured a passage on a small boat (whaleboat) paddled by ten local men on a journey that took him three weeks up the Zambezi (in Mozambique) and later Shire (in Malawi) rivers (Doss 1993:18).

On the way, rains fell almost every day and on several occasions, James fell ill of malaria, a disease that would eventually kill him (see Doss 1993:17-18). On many stops on the way, James played his violin and sang for the villagers who gave him presents of maize or chickens as appreciation of his performances. The final part of the journey, about 18 miles, was made on foot. Weak from fever and fatigued by the long travel, James hired men for ten shillings who carried him on a *machila* (portable hammock) until they reached Katunga near Blantyre on 5 March 1893 (Cripps 1971:5; Langworthy 1996:43). Blantyre was then an emerging town founded in 1876, and named after by David Livingstone after his birthplace in Blantyre, Scotland, and surrounded by Christian missions, white settler estates and a commercial trading post run by the African Lakes Company (McCracken 1989: 537-540; Ross, 1996:92-94).

The African porters directed him to the office of the Reverend David Clement Scott, the Presbyterian missionary at Blantyre mission (founded 1876), who had already been in the country for twelve years (Ross, 1996:143). Upon inquiring about lodging for the night and for the subsequent days, Scott politely informed him that he had no room to take in strangers and

advised him to seek accommodation at Mandala belonging to the African Lakes Company, a firm established in 1878 by two Scottish brothers, John and Frederick Moir (Ross 1996:40). ALC accommodation turned out to be above James' meager means and it was then that he sought out Booth whom he had been told about in Cape Town, and with whom he was interested to meet to get ideas on how to set up a mission site of his own (Langworthy 1996:43).

By the time James arrived in Malawi, a British administration under Harry Johnston had just been set up in 1891. Already during this time three main Christian groups - all Protestants - had been in the country for over two decades, and set up permanent mission stations. The first Christian mission and dominant at the centre of Lake Malawi was the Anglican Church (Tengatenga 2010:63-68). The second was the Free Church of Scotland, which established a mission at Livingstonia in 1875 and had much influence in the Ngoni country bordering west of Lake Malawi (McCracken 1977:47-64). The third was the Church of Scotland, which established a mission at Blantyre in 1876 and had influence in the area along the Shire River to the south of Lake Malawi (Ross 1996:17-38). Of great significance to the story about James and the SDA church in Malawi was the presence of Booth's non-sectarian mission, the Zambezi Industrial Mission (ZIM) at Mitsidi and ten kilometers away from Scott's Blantyre mission (Langworthy 1996:31-32).

Returning to the thread of our story, Booth welcomed James warmly and put him up at his ZIM mission and thus beginning an important relationship that lasted until James' early demise a year later. For Booth this was the second time he was interacting with SDAs and that crucially from his first meeting with them in Cape Town they had engendered in him 'an important awareness of the Seventh day Sabbath' (Langworthy 1996:28). As such, for Booth the Sabbath question was an issue that lingered for a long time in his mind. Of his encounter with the Cape Town congregation Booth was later to write that the SDA church "had so much to teach and I was not able to take it in" (Langworthy 1996:28). For James, a typical SDA with a burning desire to share his faith and as told by the Cape Town congregation also aware of Booth's predisposition to 'Adventist ideology', he again impressed upon Booth regarding the Sabbath question and other key SDA theological teachings, including rebaptism. On Rebaptism, Booth began to apply this on converts to his Zambezi mission (Baptist) from Blantyre mission (Presbyterian), then the only other Christian mission in Malawi (Langworthy 1996:43-56).

Two weeks after his arrival in Malawi, James wrote a lengthy letter to the SDA Foreign Missions Board detailing his travels and immediate impression of the country and its people. He reiterated his appeal for financial support for his proposed missionary activities. In the letter, James also challenged young SDA men and women at Battle Creek College to come to Africa. In an appeal reminiscent of Livingstone's, James wrote:

I know that there are young men and women in Battle Creek College alone who could come and be the means of helping these people. Then why not come, brethren and sisters? What rejoicing there will be in heaven when the angels see...sinners in ...Africa repenting of their sins, and crying to God for mercy and pardon (TARSH cited in Doss 1993:18).

In the same letter, James expressed his conviction that this was God's calling for him but quickly observed the difficulties of preaching the SDA message, especially on the Sabbath question not only to the local people but also to Booth as highlighted in the following excerpt:

It looks to me like a splendid opening for the truth to go. I expect there will be quite a stir here as soon as it is fully known what doctrine we are teaching, hence I want to make friends with them all, so that they will listen to reason. I want to move slowly but surely for the Master (TARSH cited in Doss 1993:18).

The meeting and subsequent association between James and Booth was cordial. In particular, Booth was hospitable and generous to the young and inexperienced James. Booth went out of his way to assist James, even offering any of the seven plots of land he had acquired from local chiefs if James wanted to set up a mission (Matemba 2004: 27). In addition, Booth offered James the use of his African interpreters whenever he wanted them, and in fact, on most of his evangelistic meetings Booth accompanied James to render further assistance. James was so impressed with Booth's generosity that at one point he had considered asking him for financial support to start his missionary work in the country (Langworthy 1996:43-44). A closer understanding of Booth during this time would suggest that he had also developed an interest to establish an interdenominational mission and therefore having James join him in this venture would begin to put in motion this plan. However, as an Adventist and averse to interdenominationalism or ecumenical arrangements with churches, James politely declined such collaboration (see Langworthy 1996:43).

On 19 or 20 March 1893 two weeks after James' arrival, Booth left briefly for Durban, South Africa, to collect £250 that sent to him by his ZIM sponsors. In some ways, Booth's absence gave James the opportunity to interact with local chiefs and some of the emerging prominent Africans. He also visited other missions to learn about their method of operation. James visited local chiefs in the Blantyre area, many of whom requested him to open schools in their villages and that on such visits he also entertained the crowds with his violin (Cripps 1971:5). However, it is worth pointing out that in his interaction with the local people (preaching and playing his violin) James did not 'treat the sick' as has been erroneously suggested in some extant sources (e.g. DACB nd:np) because there is no record anywhere that James had medical knowledge to make him also a medical missionary.

In Booth's absence James also visited Blantyre mission where he interacted formally with D.C. Scott, the missionary in-charge, whom he had briefly met when he first arrived in the country two weeks previously (Langworthy 1996:44). Other than inquiring from D.C. Scott about missionary work, James was interested to procure a book on the Mang'anja language (spoken in the area) Scott had recently published. In the *Review and Herald* of 22 February 1898, the church claimed that James quickly learnt the local language although in my view the extent of his fluency in the language is difficult to ascertain. That he could have learnt some aspects of the local language and that perhaps had a smattering knowledge of it is not disputable because many local people in the area had received some form of formal education at Blantyre mission and could have translated for him or given him the basics of the language. The availability of Scott's magisterial book (737 pages), *Cyclopaedic Dictionary of the Mang'anja Language* (1892), on the Mang'anja language then commonly spoken in British Central Africa (Malawi) might have helped James to grasp not only the fundamentals of the language but the cultural context of the people which Scott sensitively portrayed (Shepperson and Price 1987:17; Ross 1996:67).

With plans to set up his own mission, James was keen to learn the local language. In a letter to the Foreign Missions Board, he stated in part that,

... To continue the work, adding to it to all I can, and in the meantime studying the language, so that I can be able to travel better among the [people] (TARSH 1893 cited in Doss 1993:18).

Overall, the meeting between Scott and James was affable such that Scott invited the SDA visitor to dinner later that day where afterwards James played his violin while Scott played the piano (Langworthy 1996:43-44).

The Sabbath question

Although during his time in Malawi James talked about other core SDA doctrines such as Christ's Second Coming and rebaptism (Malawi Union 1993b:1), the Sabbath doctrine dominated his discussions with Booth and others he came into contact with (Langworthy 1996:56). His interaction with Booth provided James with an opportunity for evangelism regarding the biblical Fourth Commandment. As the two missionaries became more acquainted, James intensified his message on the Sabbath question. Eventually, James' fervent preaching on the subject aroused a genuine interest in Booth (Matemba 2001:1-2). Although Booth was neither *converted* nor *baptised* into SDA fellowship, he nevertheless was convinced of the theological teaching about the Sabbath (Langworthy 1996:161).

Therefore, on the first Sabbath after James' arrived at Mitsidi, Booth invited all his workers and converts (about 200 of them) to a church service that he jointly conducted with James. Booth was the first to speak. He preached on Exodus 20: 1-17 and particularly dwelt on the fourth commandment, telling the congregation that Saturday was the right day of worship (Langworthy 1996:45). For his part, James spoke for more than three hours and reemphasized the appropriateness of the *Seventh Day Sabbath*. The impact of James' teaching and preaching on the Sabbath worship on Booth was profound such subsequently he made fundamental changes to his mission policy, for example, that he,

... Set aside Sabbath worship on his mission and Sunday for witnessing in the surrounding villages... [and] a number of students at his mission showed keen interest (Doss 1993:18).

For James, his initial evangelistic meetings had been a success because of the interest towards the SDA church he aroused in Booth, and in the local people who attended the meetings. Booth's sudden theological 'conversion' and changes he made to his mission policy surprised his workers to say the least because until this time they had known him as a Sunday observing Baptist. Further, many of those Booth had converted and baptised into the Baptist fellowship were also equally perplexed by this. On one occasion, one of his Bible students in reference to the Sabbath asked "why were we not taught this by other missionaries?" (Langworthy 1996:43).

The implication of Booth's new mission policy was that by declaring that two days were to be set aside for religious activities in a week, mission industrial work would suffer. Booth's new mission policy that did not sit well with white farmers in the area who depended heavily on cheap African labour. The farmers were infuriated about 'this Saturday teaching' for it meant that 'their workers who took up the Sabbath position would not want to work on Saturday which to them was the true Seventh day or the Sabbath' (Shepperson and Price 1987:64). Blantyre mission, the main Christian Centre in the area also weighed in on the issue. In May 1893 D.C. Scott added his voice to these concerns and objected to Booth and James 'who calls [sic] Saturday Sunday, and tells the boys [local men] so'. Scott went further to say that since Booth's mission was so close to his "... the presence of the ZIM and Booths' activities tended to introduce schism into the native church" (Langworthy 1996:59).

Later, even Booth himself expressed some doubt that perhaps he had rushed his decision on the Sabbath question for his mission. It would seem that although James had made a huge impression on Booth, in the end Booth had to consider other issues, as has been observed:

He [Booth] was too busy to see the way clearly to accept the many new ideas, not just the Sabbath but other SDA issues as well. As a result, he rejected the whole approach including the Sabbath although subsequently he felt uncomfortable while reading the passages in the Bible (Langworthy 1996:44).

Even though such opposition must have been disappointing for James, nevertheless he had planted a seed about the SDA message in the hearts of the many people he met. Although for practical reasons Booth had reconsidered his position on the Sabbath approach for the smooth running of his mission, he remained convinced of its veracity and never completely abandoned it. According to Langworthy:

The James visit was a doctrinal interlude in the short run, as the Sabbath receded as an issue after his departure, but in the long run it was to be a factor in Booth's move to the Sabbath in 1898 (Langworthy 1996:44).

Booth's spiritual convictions are difficult to explain, as are any motives for conversion and causes of belief. Throughout his missionary career, Booth constantly questioned his own beliefs and was not afraid to embrace new 'light of truth' and discard the old that could not stand against the new. Particularly his 'conversion' relating to the two Sabbath keeping churches (i.e. Seventh-day Baptism and Seventh-day Adventist) he engaged with after his meeting with James who had impressed upon him the Sabbath Question. This has engendered a debate in mission studies, with one view suggesting that Booth's 'leaps of faith' was a convenient way to attract "... small but relatively prosperous ... American churches that could support his new missionary adventures" because of his decision to work for two Sabbath keeping churches in Malawi as their torchbearer. First, at Plainfield mission under Seventh-day Baptists (1898-1901), and later after it was renamed Malamulo mission (1902-1903) under SDA (Shepperson and Price 1987:19). A different position maintaining that Booth's religious conversions were a genuine search for spiritual truth, particularly in search for the Sabbath Question (compare Langworthy 1996:162-163; Shepperson and Price 1997:134; Fielder 1996: 33-35). Yet, another view taking a midline position in suggesting that Booth's 'conversion' from Seventh-day Baptism to Seventh-day Adventism within a short period was "... a complex combination of sincerity, desperation and self-opportunism" (Langworthy 1996:161).

In my view, although Booth accepted new teachings (i.e. SDA Sabbath Question and rebaptism) he remained a Baptist all his life but only used other denominations to advance his missionary projects (Matemba 2001:3). In any case, Booth's decision to link up the SDA church, albeit briefly, had positive outcomes for the church in two main ways: first, this demonstrated the efficacy of the Sabbath message planted by the Cape Town SDA congregation in 1892, and later, fiercely reinforced by James in his interaction with Booth between 1893 and 1894. Secondly, for the first time the church entered Central Africa with its work when a permanent base was established at Malamulo mission in 1902 through the efforts of Booth.

In Search of the Solusi missionary party

In June 1894—the same year David Kalaka and Steven Haskell opened SDA work in Lesotho and E.L. Sanford and R.G. Rudolph entered Ghana with the SDA message—a group of SDA missionaries was pushing north from South Africa going into present day Zimbabwe. Under Fred Sparrow, the missionary party reached Bulawayo at the end of June 1894. On 4 July, the imperialist Cecil Rhodes gave part of a piece of land (12000 acres) he bought or taken from the local people under chief Soluswe on which Solusi mission (a corruption of the name Soluswe) was founded (Mfune 2002:1-2).

Upon learning of Solusi mission via SDA missionary magazine, *Review and Herald*, which he regularly received through the colonial postal service system created in 1891 (see Baker 1971: 14-15), James decided to travel to Solusi and not returning home to the USA as has been claimed in some sources (compare MMA 1977:2; Doss 1993:17-18). We will never know for sure why James decided to follow the Solusi party although it is possible that after spending a grueling

year walking in villages, preaching and talking to chiefs and other missionaries, the stark reality of missionary in the hinterland of Africa without church support must have become apparent to him. It has been noted that,

He [James] came to realize, however, that without an organization behind him, and a piece of land where he could open up a mission station, his work could not be permanent (AHC 1952:4).

Perhaps with the intention of meeting the Solusi missionaries to "... to tell them of the bright prospects in Nyasaland [Malawi], and then return" (AHC 1952:4), James bid Booth and other acquaintances farewell, bought a passage in a small boat on a river trip on the Shire on his way to Solusi. The suggestion in some extant sources that the Solusi party sent James 'funds to make the trip' is difficult substantiate (*The Review and Herald* 1898:14). There is a story repeated in missionary narratives that when local people heard that he was leaving they "... cried as the paddle-steamer started its slow trip down the Zambezi" (Cripps 1971:5) with him assuring them that "he would return with more missionaries" (Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia 1996:81).

A lonely demise

Tragically, James never completed that journey. Soon after setting off he became gravely ill probably from recurring malaria, and died soon afterwards in the boat he sailed in, and leaving behind his favourite violin as a permanent reminder of his presence. Porters who had travelled with him quickly buried him in an unmarked grave on the bank of the Shire River (Doss 1993:18; Cripps 1971:5). Although James died a lonely death, he was never forgotten by the local people who knew him and who never forgot the white man who preached about the Sabbath and entertained them with the 'box that could sing' (Koester 1994:13). James seemed to have left a lasting impression that some years later, William .H. Anderson, the missionary founder of Rusangu SDA mission (established 1905) in Zambia, met "some Nyasaland Africans who describes the very features of George James" (Doss 1993:18).

However, from here the historical records about James differ regarding not only when he died but also 'how long did James actually work in Malawi?' (Doss 1993:18). Some sources say that James died of malaria on his way to Solusi mission (Malawi Union 1993b) while other sources report that he "remained in Malawi for three years, preaching and captivating the crowds with his violin music" (Cripps 1971:3). Yet, other sources report that James worked in Africa for five years and died in 1897 or 1898 (compare Doss 1993:18; Malawi Union 1993b:1).

What seems to complicate the issue further is that the news of James' death took a long time to come to the notice of the church. Being a self-sponsored and independent missionary meant that there were no official mechanics to track his whereabouts. In fact, news of James' death only came to the attention of the church in the late 1890s, when his obituary appeared in the *Review and Herald* of 22 February 1898, five years after his death and with factual errors. The obituary stated:

You will all be sorry to hear that Brother George James, who has been in the interior of South Africa the last five years, died last week at sea, on his way home either to America or to Britain (*Review and Herald* cited in Doss 1993:18).

Perhaps unsure of the circumstances and details of his death, the reportage in that issue suggested that James had died that year (1898), and went on to erroneously state that he had been in the interior of Africa from 1892 until his death at sea in 1898 on his way back either to America or to Britain. Even in the excerpt cited above, further factual errors are evident. Some

observation are necessary here. First, James did not work in the ‘interior of South Africa’ rather than he worked in the interior of central Africa (here again South Africa should be distinguished as a country and not a region). From the evidence collected and analysed James worked only for a year and three months in the interior of central Africa (Malawi), from March 1892 to June 1894, and not for five years as has been suggested. James died on the Shire River and not at sea, and finally, his destination was Solusi mission, Zimbabwe, and not either America or Britain.

Critical observations

How much George James contributed for the church during his brief stay in the Malawi (March 1892 to June 1894) has been slightly exaggerated in some extant sources, perhaps to support the popular legend about him as the pioneer SDA missionary to Central Africa. Robert Folkenberg (1941-2015), president of the SDA world church from 1990 to 1999 suggested that as a result of James’ efforts in Malawi “... the gospel went into the neighbouring countries of Zambia, Tanzania, and Mozambique” (Folkenberg 1993:4). In a letter to this author, Wenson Masoka (1947-2014) president of the SDA church in Malawi from 1988 to 1997 stated that ‘he [James] planted the seed but never saw it grow to maturity’ (Masoka 1996: personal communication to author). Similarly, as we have seen, others such as Koetser and Folkenberg have claimed that James’ arrival in Malawi in 1893 signaled the beginnings of the SDA church in Malawi, to the extent of Koester erroneously claiming that James had “... a small group of converts [that] continued to worship together [after his demise a year later]” (compare Folkenberg 1993:3; Koester 1994:13).

Sources are lacking to provide a comprehensive account of the contribution James may have made for the church during his brief missionary sojourn in Malawi. What is not in dispute is that James was the path-breaker as the “very first Adventist to preach our district message in the heart of Africa” (Malawi Union 1993b:3). However, from the discussion in this paper there is no evidence to support the claim that James’ arrival signaled the beginnings of the church in Malawi. While James should be credited for helping Booth embrace Sabbatarian doctrines, the cold facts are that the circumstances leading to the official beginnings of the church at Malamulo mission in 1902 had no direct connection to James (see Matemba 2002:1; Matemba 2004:27).

Again, in assessing James’ evangelical work its worth stressing that there is no evidence to suggest that anyone was converted or that a church building, however rudimental, was built by the time James left on that doomed trip to meet the Solusi party. James’ evangelical work was done with the help of Booth and in Booths’ churches or among his congregations to the extent that when Booth left briefly for Durban on 19 or 20 March 1893 James was at a loss as what to do, admitting that without Booth he could not see the way forward in his endeavors. In a letter James wrote to the Foreign Missions Board, his concerns are revealing:

Mr Bs [Booth] leaving will cause the work done already, if left without anyone die out, as it is quite new to them and will meet with many foes; so I deem it best, for the present, to continue the work, adding to it all I can, and in the meantime studying the language, so that I can be able to travel better among the natives (TARSH 1893:518).

Despite what others such as Beverly Koester have claimed, there is no evidence to support the suggestion that James left ‘a small group of converts that continued to worship together’ and neither was Booth “among his first converts’ (Koester 1994:13). From available sources, James’ interaction with the local people and indeed with Booth, did not convert anyone nor did he leave a group of converts during his brief time in Malawi. It would take eight long years before *real* SDA work was started at Malamulo mission in 1902, and even there the church would baptise its first converts of seven men three years later on 30 September 1905 (AHC 1952:4).

If James' work had impact, it was through Booth who embraced the Sabbath teaching but not as a converted 'Seventh-day Adventist'. We must understand that although Booth had 'Sabbatist' leanings and at one point embraced Seventh Day Baptists (a distinct American Sabbatarian religious grouping but not widely known compared to SDAs), he had remained a *First Day Baptist* all his life (see Fielder nd:np; Matamba 2001:3). This information about Booth is important because although he preached about the Sabbath to his local congregants, which continued after James' died, such teaching was not done with the intention for conversion into the SDA church neither for him nor for his Baptist congregants. While it is not a matter for dispute that there was some 'Adventist' influence in his thinking about the Sabbath, most likely he was preaching his own version of Sabbatarianism - a mixture of Seventh-day Adventism and Seventh-day Baptism. Shepperson and Price have noted Booth's theological dilemma:

... Booth was not yet ready for the Adventists' eschatology, and he found in the ideas of the Seventh Day Baptists a more amenable combination of his old Baptist principles and the new idea that the true Sabbath was the seventh day (Shepperson and Price 1987:119).

There is an incident concerning an evangelistic trip Booth made to the Mang'anja people living near Nsanje under a headman called Chataika. The dating of this incident is not clear and has been suggested to have taken place either in 1893 or 1894 although most likely it took place after James' demise in 1894. Through an interpreter, Booth preached about the Bible and there was an immediate excitement among the people especially on the village elders (Langworthy 1996:47). When Booth began preaching about the fourth commandment [Sabbath] Chataika is said to have retorted:

Tell us which is that day; we are ready to give God His day... Tell us which is the Seventh Day, and we will watch and mark, and give that day to God' (Langworthy 1996:47).

To which Booth replied:

Today is the first day of the week. Yesterday was the last day of the week, so yesterday was the seventh day. Almost all white men worship on the first day, for that is now the custom. "I was again surprised at the swift retort of this man. He learnt forward and said, "Who gave you white men power more than God? Have you power to make laws, and put the laws of God under your own? What is this you tell, that white men worship on the first day, when God has told them to give him the seventh day? (Langworthy 1996:47).

After some discussion among themselves, the people resolved not to keep the white man's day (i.e. Sunday), but God's, and from that day about fourteen people in the village began to keep the Sabbath even before Booth himself (Langworthy 1996:47-48). In this exchange, Chataika exuded clarity of thought that the Seventh-day Sabbath was 'new' light that challenged Booth's previous theological teaching about God's day of worship, and importantly, Chataika's realization of the Whiteman's self-imposed authority in changing at will God's law regarding the biblical Seventh Day Sabbath (i.e. Saturday). That such a debate was taking place at the first encounter between Africans and the SDA message as early as the 1890s is interesting as it is enduring because the Sabbath question remains an on-going theological debate within Christendom.

The actions of Chataika and his people in 'rejecting' the white man's day of worship speaks to wider issues of the subaltern's ability (or not) to think and speak for himself (see Spivak

1988:271-273; Sefa-Dei 2012:41-44), *albeit* within the confines of a missionary/colonial hegemony on the social space in which such complex theological discussions took place. Finally, the Chataika-Booth Sabbath debate serves as a lasting example of the impact James's evangelical work may have had on Booth and the local people that he interacted with on the Sabbath question, one of the key theological teachings and practice that distinguishes the SDA church from other mainstream Trinitarian Christian denominations (Höschele 2004:37).

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to bring a greater awareness to and appreciation of the pioneering missionary activities of George James, who in 1893 was the first SDA to come to Malawi. In recounting this largely untold story, the paper has also addressed some of the factual errors in extant sources where aspects of James' story have appeared. James' evangelical work was affected by the reluctance of the church leadership to endorse him as a missionary. If James had the necessary support, the SDA church could have had a mission in Malawi, probably even before Solusi mission. Finally, we will never know what James could have achieved had he survived the trip to meet the Solusi party although it is most likely that he could have asked the Solusi missionaries to help him establish a mission in Malawi as well.

Notes

ⁱ The 'three angels' message is one of the core theological teachings of the church, based on an interpretation of the messages given by three angels in Revelation 14:6–12 for the remnant to prepare the world for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

ⁱⁱ Joseph Booth (1851-1932) is a towering figure in the history of evangelical type churches in Malawi. His missionary work is credited with the origins of a number of 'smaller' missions in Malawi, including SDA of a number connected with the originals of a number of 'smaller' churches in Malawi, including SDA (Langworthy 1996). By 'smaller' churches, I take Klaus Fielder's definition that historically these are evangelical in nature, non-conformist theologically and small in size in the country of their origin. This categorisation however does not suggest a permanent criterion of these churches but only as a historical description when they were founded in Malawi (see Fielder 1995).

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