

FREEDOM TO WITNESS:
SOUTHERN BAPTISTS IN RHODESIA, 1950-1980

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SOUTHERN BAPTISTS IN RHODESIA, 1950-1980

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This paper explores the activities and experiences of a small group of American missionaries, Southern Baptists, who went to Rhodesia to spread their faith, but often found themselves caught between the movement for majority rule and white resistance. Southern Baptist missionaries spent thirty years spreading their faith in white-ruled Rhodesia. Throughout this period the mission successfully avoided confrontation with the Rhodesian government and converted Africans to their faith and their denominational work. In balancing their commitments to evangelism, law and order, and racial equality, the thirty year history consistently points to evangelism and conversion as the primary concern of Baptist missionaries. Only when Rhodesian law threatened this commitment did the Baptist Mission protest against white authorities. Rarely did the missionaries challenge the racist policies of the Rhodesian government. By placing their commitment to law and order above racial equality, Baptists applied an evangelistic pragmatism that allowed them freedom to live in Rhodesia and “witness” to the majority African population.

Approved Gary Gerstle

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On February 3, 1960 British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan addressed South Africa's parliament and warned: "The wind of change is blowing through this continent, and whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact. We must all accept it as a fact, and our national policies must take account of it." While only four independent nations existed in Africa in 1945, seventeen nations emerged in 1960 alone.¹ At the very same time Macmillan spoke of the impending political transformation of Africa, Billy Graham was in the midst of a seventeen city tour of the continent preaching his own message of change. After leading large crusades in Liberia, Ghana, and Nigeria, Graham arrived in Rhodesia. Continuing his policy of refusing to preach to segregated audiences, Graham caused a stir when he spoke to an audience of 9,000 people in Bulawayo that the Associated Press called "the greatest multiracial religious service ever held" in the country.² Southern Baptist missionary John Cheyne described the events in Rhodesia as "the greatest demonstration of Christian power to break the curse of African apartheid...as black and white—sinners all—stood side by side, forgetting the barriers of color to trust in the power of his shed blood to cleanse."³ Billy Graham returned to the United States after seven weeks, but there were other Americans who would devote years of their lives to changing Africa one soul at a time.

¹ Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa, From the Hopes of Freedom to the Heart of Despair: A History of Fifty Years of Independence* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), 10.

² "Multiracial Talk Held," *New York Times*, 21 Feb 21 1960, p. 15.

³ John R. Cheyne. "One Shiny Pebble," *The Commission*, June 1960, 16-17.

As the tide of African nationalism and independence swept across the continent, authorities in Southern Africa, including Rhodesia, persistently and violently enforced white rule. This paper explores the activities and experiences of a small group of American missionaries, Southern Baptists, who went to Rhodesia to spread their faith, but often found themselves caught between the movement for majority rule and white resistance. Even in a country as divided as Rhodesia, Southern Baptists strove for the ideal of being all things to all people. As one Southern Baptist wrote, “Retaining the confidence of both sides—that could easily be the unstated goal of Southern Baptist missionaries, since they go into countries to witness to all the people, not only to those who may be oppressed, but also to the men in power.”⁴ Rhodesia in particular provides a context in which to look at how Southern Baptists reacted when their own religious and ethical ideals conflicted with one another. As white American southerners, these missionaries found themselves in a precarious position in Rhodesia throughout the postwar period.

After World War II, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) became the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. Scholars have written extensively about Baptists and the SBC; often in relationship to race and the civil rights movement in the South. In 1967 sociologist Sam Hill laid the foundation for the study of southern Protestantism, arguing that the central theme was individual conversion. A singular devotion to conversion led to an emphasis on evangelism and missions, and defined morality primarily as a vertical relationship between the individual believer and God. As a result, southern churches, among whom Southern Baptists were the majority, ignored or

⁴ “The Missionary and Human Rights,” *The Commission*, September 1978, 18.

were blind to the role of social structures.⁵ So when some Baptists began to view racial oppression as a problem, their solution was to change the South through individual conversion. For most of their history white southern churches, including Southern Baptist churches, supported white supremacy and Jim Crow. Recent work by historian Mark Newman looks specifically at how Southern Baptists viewed desegregation after WWII. Newman demonstrates how both a commitment to conversion and a belief in the Bible as God's literal word allowed a small group of progressive Baptists to successfully attack segregation within the denomination. These Southern Baptists believed that the Bible required a commitment to law and order and to evangelism, and called on individual Baptists to challenge practices such as segregation and white supremacy that interfered with these ideals. Newman emphasizes the role of the *Brown* decision and the Civil Rights Act in transforming Southern Baptists' view of segregation. Because Baptists believed the Bible commanded them to obey the law, the new federal statutes shifted the ethical views of progressive Baptists. After *Brown* these progressives argued for adherence to the new interpretation of the Constitution and attacked those who used the Bible to defend segregation. Only in 1964, after the Civil Rights Act, did these progressives begin to move beyond attacking segregation and call for integration.⁶ Alan Scot Willis also argues that beginning in the forties a group of progressive Southern Baptists actively campaigned within the institutions of the SBC for greater racial equality. Willis focuses on the role of missionaries and the SBC's Foreign Mission Board (FMB) and their efforts to convince other Baptists of "the biblical mandates of racial equality and unity, the international dimensions of the race question, and the personal

⁵ Samuel S. Hill, Jr., *Southern Churches in Crisis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966).

⁶ Mark Newman, *Getting Right With God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1995* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001).

responsibility of each Christian to work for better race relations.”⁷ Together these works describe Southern Baptist missionaries as a group who generally held a progressive view of race within the context of their denomination and the American South and who sought to maintain commitments to evangelism, law and order, and racial equality. In looking at Southern Baptist missionaries in Rhodesia, I hope to use the context of African nationalism to explore the relationship between an American religion and the role of race. While Baptists in Rhodesia failed to directly challenge the racial system in Rhodesia, my aim is to go beyond ascribing moral culpability, which tends to simplify the situation. Instead, I hope to uncover how these white Americans viewed their work and their role in the tense political and racial environment of Rhodesia.

Though Southern Baptists had worked in a variety of African colonies, the only mission to survive World War II was in Nigeria. The Nigerian Mission was established in 1850, second only to China as the Southern Baptist’s oldest mission.⁸ In 1950, the year the FMB began supporting mission work in Rhodesia, there were already 131 Southern Baptist missionaries preaching, teaching, and organizing in Nigeria.⁹ In 1947 the FMB also sent missionaries to the Gold Coast. The experiences of Southern Baptists in Nigeria, the Gold Coast, and other parts of Africa would become highly relevant to the Rhodesia Mission. As Southern Baptists confronted problems of race and nationalism across Africa, they sought to define their missionary presence in ways that would avoid accusations of white supremacy and western imperialism, while at the same time cooperating with those in power. The Rhodesia Mission, as the largest Baptist mission in

⁷ Alan Scot Willis, *All According to God’s Plan: Southern Baptist Missions and Race, 1945-1970* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2005).

⁸ Willis, 74.

⁹ Minutes of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (Hereafter “FMB Minutes”), June 20, 1951.

Southern Africa, provides an opportunity to analyze how Southern Baptists balanced their commitments to conversion, law and order, and racial equality.¹⁰

The first Southern Baptist missionaries in Rhodesia were Clyde and Hattie Dotson of Alabama. The Dotsons had been working in Rhodesia since 1930 as independent Baptist missionaries unaffiliated with a major mission board.¹¹ In 1950 the FMB decided to begin denominational work in Rhodesia by officially appointing the Dotsons as missionary representatives of the SBC. Clyde wrote a report for the 1951 Southern Baptist Annual Convention describing his mission field:

It is difficult for Americans, accustomed to seeing Baptist churches within easy reach of everybody, to visualize a whole country of 150,000 square miles, with a European population of 113,000 and an African population of 1,687,000, having a total of only four Baptist churches and these with a combined membership of only 330. This is Southern Rhodesia.

Clyde noted that all four Baptist churches were European (meaning white), and implored Southern Baptists to send missionaries and resources to evangelize the 1.6 million Africans who were “a field white unto harvest.”¹² The FMB responded to the Dotsons’ plea by sending more white missionaries to Rhodesia, and these Southern Baptists found themselves needing the goodwill of both the Africans whom they sought to work with and the whites who held power. This precarious position was only compounded by the missionaries’ identities as white U.S. southerners in the post-war era. Throughout the fifties and sixties Southern Baptist missionaries in Rhodesia strove to preach a gospel that distinguished them from colonial and western powers, while both their whiteness and their American identity often worked against them.

¹⁰ Both Rhodesia and the Baptist Mission went through a number of name changes throughout the 50’s and 60’s. Rhodesia was known as Southern Rhodesia until 1964, and for a time Baptists were organized in the Central Africa Baptist Mission. For the sake of simplicity I am using the later terms “Rhodesia” and “Rhodesia Baptist Mission.”

¹¹ “New Appointees,” *The Commission*. March 1951, 24. “Forty Years of Promises,” *The Commission*, December 1970, 7-9.

¹² FMB Minutes, June 20, 1951.

In 1952 Clyde Dotson reported that Baptists “have regular services in every town of any size in Southern Rhodesia except Umtali, and we plan on opening work there next year.”¹³ While much of the Baptist’s mission work was conducted in urban areas, they had also been given a thousand acres near rural African tribal lands which became known as the Sanyati Reserve. Missionary Ralph Bowlin believed the reserve was significant for the mission because “the eyes of the government officials, and the African[s] and Europeans throughout Southern Rhodesia are focused on Sanyati Reserve as the first outstanding Baptist project in the colony. The first impressions of our work, policies and effectiveness are being formed largely from that which takes place here on the reserve.”¹⁴ Along with churches, the missionaries built a school and a hospital on the reserve, all of which were used to accomplish the task of winning souls and training church leaders in Rhodesia.

By the middle of the decade Southern Baptists were operating about twenty primary schools and a seminary to train African pastors. In order to establish the Baptist Seminary of Central Africa near the town of Gwelo, the missionaries had to work around the rigid segregation practiced in Rhodesia. The Rhodesian government required the white missionaries to live in European sections of town and regulated or restricted their movement among the African population.¹⁵ As a result, the missionaries built their seminary in a rural area, away from the supervision of authorities and disapproving white Rhodesians.

The seminary is located 12 miles from the town of Gwelo, on a large rural compound. This location was originally chosen because of problems of developing a seminary for Africans in one of the Rhodesian cities, where the color bar was at one time a real

¹³ FMB Minutes, May 14, 1952.

¹⁴ FMB Minutes, Feb. 12, 1953.

¹⁵ FMB Minutes, Feb. 8, 1962 and Feb. 14, 1963. Also “Gaining Understanding Through Discussion,” *The Commission*, 1960.

problem. In the isolation of this rural setting, there is a perfect freedom of relationships between white missionaries and African (sic) students.¹⁶

Southern Baptist missionaries understood that race could interfere with their evangelistic, educational, and medical work in Rhodesia. They were fearful that Africans would identify them with the white Rhodesians who held power and as a result attack Christianity as a Western and imperial religion. Southern Baptist missionaries also tended to view racism as immoral and an obstacle their goals of conversion and evangelism.¹⁷ One missionary in Rhodesia reported a church service in which an African told him, “I am a Christian but in recent years I have become a cynical Christian, seeing that the Europeans who call themselves Christians come and have no dealings with us except across the counter.”¹⁸

The missionaries also believed that racial discrimination against blacks opened the door for communist influence in Rhodesia. Southern Baptists at home and abroad were strong supporters of U.S. Cold War policy and decried the evils of atheistic Communism. The real threat of communism to Southern Baptists was most clearly demonstrated in China, where after the Communist Revolution all missionaries, including Southern Baptists, were expelled from the country. Baptist experience in China along with other examples of communist hostility towards missionaries helped make the American Cold War framework an important factor in how Southern Baptist missionaries responded to nationalism in Africa. Dr. George Sadler of the FMB reported on the situation in Rhodesia: “It seems to me that in such a country where the African is made

¹⁶ FMB Minutes, Dec. 8, 1966.

¹⁷ Willis, 67.

¹⁸ FMB Minutes, Oct. 11, 1955.

to live in separate locations in the cities and which he cannot leave at night without police permission, there is an atmosphere that is ripe for communism.”¹⁹

The African nationalist leaders in Rhodesia, who later became known for their militant radicalism, began with calls for moderate reform. In 1957 Joshua Nkomo helped found the African National Congress (ANC), which drew on African resentment of white rulers and established a mass movement in rural and urban areas. The ANC’s platform called for non-racialism in government, land redistribution, and extension of the vote (though not universal suffrage). In 1959 the Rhodesian government banned the ANC and detained a number of its leaders. The National Democratic Party (NDP) was then formed, making bolder calls for a redistribution of power. When a 1961 conference in Salisbury resulted in constitutional reforms that preserved white rule, nationalists responded with violent protests across Rhodesia. The government then banned the NDP, which Nkomo and others immediately reformed as the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU). In 1963 infighting and disagreements over strategy divided nationalists, and Nkomo’s critics formed the Zimbabwe African Nationalist Union (ZANU), led by Ndabaningi Sithole. ZANU’s secretary general was a man named Robert Mugabe. All three leaders—Nkomo, Sithole, and Mugabe—were educated in European-run mission schools and both Nkomo and Sithole worked as preachers. Throughout the sixties the cycle of nationalist organization and white backlash repeated itself, each time radicalizing both Africans and white resistance.²⁰ Amidst these polarizing events the Southern Baptist missionaries clung to a rapidly shrinking middle ground, the only ground that would allow them to maintain their work in Rhodesia.

¹⁹ FMB Minutes, Oct. 11, 1955

²⁰ Meredith, 128-132.

These missionaries were keenly aware of the precarious nature of their position. In his report to the FMB in 1959, Dr. H. Cornell Goerner wrote, “Missionaries must work in a super-charged atmosphere of nationalism, which at the same time creates problems and provides tremendous opportunities.”²¹ In 1961 Dr. Milton Giles Fort, the chairman of the Rhodesia Mission, opened his annual report to his fellow missionaries by pointing out the “increasingly rapid emergence of African Nationalism.” Dr. Fort continued,

This year has made us increasingly aware of the fact that our American citizenship, our white skins, and our missionary status are no longer the assets which they once were in opening doors, but have become liabilities and are the cause in many instances of distrust, suspicion, and even outright rejection of our efforts and our message.²²

One of the causes of this transformation was the outbreak racial violence in the United States that revealed the extent of black oppression in America to the rest of the world.

The conflict over civil rights for blacks in America had important implications for the missionaries in Rhodesia and other parts of Africa. In 1961 missionary Gene Phillips wrote, “The Montgomery trouble and others like it made big headlines in our paper. This does not help our mission work at all. It makes the African more suspicious of us, and it makes the European scoff at us.”²³ A few months later Clyde Dotson wrote, “I think if our Christian friends at home could realize the great damage being done to missions over the world by their racial attitudes, they would try to show more love...The whole future of mission in Africa, and over the world, depends largely on whether we show that love.”²⁴ When the Birmingham, Alabama police violently attacked civil rights demonstrators in 1963, pictures of the event appeared around the world, including in African newspapers. While these events were occurring Southern Baptists in Rhodesia

²¹ FMB Minutes, Feb 12, 1959.

²² “Chairman’s Report to the Mission, May 1961.” Central Africa Book of Reports (CABR), 1961

²³ “2-Headed Political Snake May Poison Opportunities,” *The Commission*, Nov. 1961, 21.

²⁴ “Some Hunger for Gospel; Others See ‘White Christ,’” *The Commission*, Feb. 1962, 19.

and in America were holding their annual conventions. From Gwelo, Rhodesia the missionaries cabled a message to be read aloud to the SBC annual convention in Kansas City. This message urged the convention “to point out to Southern Baptists the fact that unfortunate instances of racial violence in the United States have a disastrous effect upon what our missionaries are trying to do in Africa.”²⁵ A Southern Baptist missionary in Nigeria went further in describing the impact of events in America. He reported, “As far as I am aware, nothing has ever occurred to so tarnish—and I cannot say distort—the image of America in Nigeria as the recent news together with pictures of race riots.”²⁶ With all of these issues, Southern Baptist missionaries in Rhodesia sought to preach a gospel of universal Christianity that would not be associated with whiteness, colonialism, or a racist America.

In light of the growing resistance to their presence and in recognition of the changing political environment in Rhodesia, Baptist missionaries believed in the urgency of developing independent African churches which could continue the mission’s work of saving souls. Dr. Goerner observed, “In such an atmosphere, it is inevitable and proper that increased emphasis be placed upon the efforts toward development of indigenous leadership.”²⁷ Southern Baptist missionaries across Africa began to focus on what they termed the “Africanization” of their work.

In Rhodesia and elsewhere, Southern Baptists anticipated a time where white missionaries would be unable to work with Africans. In response missionaries began to emphasize preparing African Baptists to continue the work in their absence. One of the most interesting results of the new emphasis on Africanization was that Southern Baptist

²⁵ FMB Minutes, June 20, 1963

²⁶ FMB Minutes, June 20, 1963

²⁷ FMB Minutes, Feb. 12, 1959.

missionaries encouraged a small number of African leaders to apply to Baptist colleges in America to receive training. Alan Scot Willis has written about the role of Africans in the desegregation of Baptist colleges. The integration process for Baptist institutions was contentious and complicated. Because the SBC was largely a voluntary organization and Baptist colleges were affiliated with state conventions, leaders of the SBC who supported integration could not simply impose their views on the denomination. Willis writes, “By 1952, the Southern Baptist Convention had desegregated all of its seminaries.

Institutions affiliated with state conventions were slower to integrate, especially in the Southeast.”²⁸ Up until 1960 none of the Baptist colleges in the Deep South were integrated. In that year an African convert from Ghana applied to Wake Forest in North Carolina, creating controversy over the college’s racial restrictions. In 1962 another Ghanaian convert, Sam Jerri Oni, challenged segregation at Mercer College in Georgia. Willis details how Oni and missionary Harris Mobley deliberately planned to use Oni’s application as a way to challenge the racist practices of their fellow Baptists. After divisive debates and interdenominational struggle, both Wake Forest and Mercer abandoned their racial barriers in admissions.²⁹ Progressive Baptist missionaries and leaders used the policy of Africanization to strengthen their mission abroad and also to challenge and refine their churches at home. Southern Baptist missionaries in Rhodesia also sent two converts to the Deep South in the early sixties.

Michael and Mary Makosholo taught at the Sanyati Reserve for seven years before the missionaries helped arrange for them to study at Ouachita Baptist College in

²⁸ Willis, 169.

²⁹ Willis, 169-172.

Arkadelphia, Arkansas.³⁰ The college, after deliberation, compromised by deciding to admit black converts from the mission field but not American blacks.³¹ Before arriving in Arkansas, the Makosholo's also applied for membership in Arkadelphia's all-white First Baptist Church. Mark Coppenger was an adolescent member of the church recalled the scene:

It was the only day our church had to set up chairs in the aisles. The crowd was enormous, for that day we would vote on membership for a black man. Mike Makosholo, a Nigerian (sic), had elected to attend Ouachita Baptist College, our local Southern Baptist school. He was the product of our foreign mission effort, the sort of man whose appearance in a missionary slide show brought gladness to the hearts of our people. But now he wanted to come to our utterly white school, and worse, join our utterly white church. The day of decision was announced, and the membership braced for confrontation. Ralph Phelps, the president of Ouachita spoke in the affirmative. Mr. Seymour of the men's Bible class spoke against. Fascinated by the spectacle, I was hoping for a show of hands, but someone successfully moved a ballot vote.³²

The members of the church voted on the following carefully worded resolution: "That the Church look with favor upon the application for membership of foreign negro students of Ouachita Baptist College who are recommended by two or more Southern Baptist Missionaries." After a secret ballot was conducted, the motion was passed with 419 voting for the resolution and 182 against.³³ The Makosholo's were the first blacks accepted to the church and the college in Arkadelphia, and their experience in the early sixties reveals the divide within Southern Baptist churches over racial segregation. President of Ouachita Ralph Phelps described one incident where Mary was invited to give a talk on Baptist missions in Rhodesia, "but the person who transported her was asked to see that she did not get to the meeting in time to eat with the ladies."³⁴ This was

³⁰ "A Teacher Returns," *The Commission*, December 1965, 3-4.

³¹ Willis, 171.

³² "I Never Got Over Sunday School," *The Founders Journal*. Spring 1998, Issue 32, p. 27.

³³ Business Meeting Minutes of the First Baptist Church in Arkadelphia, Ark., Feb. 4, 1962. Ouachita Baptist University Archives, University of Arkansas Libraries. Available online at: http://scipio.uark.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/digitaltest&CISOPTR=275&CISOBX=1&R_EC=13.

³⁴ "They Taught Us, Too," *The Commission*, December 1965, 4.

only one example of how some white Baptists were “less than cordial” to the Makosholo’s during their time in southern Arkansas. Despite the opposition, Michael graduated from Ouachita in 1965 with a B.A. in secondary education, and returned to Rhodesia to open the Sanyati Baptist Secondary School, a “long-standing dream that had been out of reach because of the shortage of missionaries and trained African personnel.”³⁵

While the Makosholo’s were living in Arkansas, the missionaries’ emphasis on Africanization resulted in the creation of an Independent African organization, the Rhodesia Baptist Convention (RBC).³⁶ In 1962 Dr. Cornell Goerner met with thirty African pastors of Baptist churches in Rhodesia and discussed the FMB’s changing strategy in Africa. According to Goerner, the pastors “are well aware that missionaries from America might have to leave Southern Rhodesia, and that even now there is a limit to what a white person can do in the African locations.”³⁷ With the oversight of the missionaries, Africans were encouraged to form their own convention and to write their own constitution. As Goerner later described the RBC, “Denied freedom of expression and action in the realm of politics, the members of the Convention are giving full expression to their new found freedom within the framework of a Baptist democracy.”³⁸ This new democratic “freedom,” however, soon generated new tensions between white missionaries and the African Baptist leaders.

³⁵ “A Teacher Returns.”

³⁶ Initially the Southern Rhodesia Baptist Convention.

³⁷ FMB Minutes, Sep. 13, 1962.

³⁸ FMB Minutes, Dec. 9, 1965.

From the white missionaries perspective the main issue involved disagreements over the Ten Year Plan for Developing Self-Supporting Churches.³⁹ As part of the Africanization plan, the FMB and the Rhodesian Baptist Mission set forth a plan to reduce the subsidies given to African churches, believing that an independent church should be supported financially by its members. In 1965 the RBC requested a five year moratorium on the Ten Year Plan in order to negotiate a more agreeable deal. The Baptist Mission denied the request and, in so doing, exposed the underlying racial tensions between the groups. According to John Cheyne, General Secretary of the mission, “the seeds of doubt, distrust, and dissatisfaction fired by aspersions of prejudices (sic) and parallel practices between government policies and Mission plans took root and blossomed out beyond the control and perhaps expectations of those engendering them.” At the annual meeting of the RBC, members of the old executive committee who had cooperated with missionaries were ousted and a new group of leaders took control. The RBC then adopted resolutions calling for a reduction in the number of missionaries engaged in evangelistic work, an end to missionary supervision in urban areas, the transfer of rural missions to the RBC, and an African seminary staff. Together the resolutions were a rejection of missionary influence and a promotion of African pastors to lead the work in Rhodesia. The convention then cabled Dr. Goerner in the U.S. to request the FMB’s support, threatening to break off all relationships with the mission if he did not extend it. Cheyne concluded his report by observing that “much of the present state of affairs has been engendered and provoked by the political situation which is rapidly moving to a head.”⁴⁰ Goerner and the missionaries were unwilling to grant the

³⁹ “Historians Report,” Rhodesia Mission Book of Reports (RMBR), 1966.

⁴⁰ “Baptist Convention of Central Africa,” RMBR, 1965.

RBC control of mission institutions while continuing financial subsidies. The missionaries continued their work by avoiding the institutional leaders of the RBC and working directly with African pastors and churches. Eventually the RBC elected new officers and a working relationship was put in place. While the rift between white missionaries and African leaders was on the mend, missionary records indicate the tensions persisted.

Cheyne and other missionaries had good reason to be worried about increasing racial tensions. The year 1964 was a particularly frustrating one for Africans in Rhodesia. On January 1 the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland dissolved, putting Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland on the road to independence and majority rule. Southern Rhodesia then became Rhodesia, and in April Ian Smith became the new head of the Rhodesian Front and Prime Minister. One of his first moves was to declare ZAPU and ZANU illegal organizations and to detain Nkomo, Sithole, and Mugabe.⁴¹ In 1965 Smith announced the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), which severed Rhodesia's connections with Britain. In his address Smith stated, "We have struck a blow for the preservation of justice, civilization, and Christianity."⁴² This declaration further shrunk the space in which Southern Baptist missionaries could operate.

In response to the turmoil in Rhodesia and throughout Africa Southern Baptists increasingly defined their missionary presence as apolitical while retaining their support of law and order. FMB leaders constructed a policy requiring political neutrality and missionaries in Rhodesia strove to apply a quiescent faith to an explosive political situation. According to missionaries and board members, this policy of political

⁴¹ Meredith, 133.

⁴² Meredith, page.

neutrality was based on the Baptist belief in the complete separation of church and state.⁴³

Dr. Goerner himself was in Rhodesia when Ian Smith announced UDI on November 11, 1965. Despite the international condemnation of an independent Rhodesia committed to white rule, Dr. Goerner explained the importance of neutrality for Baptist work in Rhodesia:

In Rhodesia, as in every other country in which Southern Baptist missionaries are located, our representatives have maintained a strictly neutral position politically. They have neither praised the Ian Smith regime nor condemned it. They thus are free to continue their work, the vast preponderance of which is among the African majority within a society controlled by the white minority... Our missionaries are not revolutionaries. As long as the present government is in control, and is able to maintain law and order, they will respect it and live under its law... We now face the necessity of understanding and sympathizing with the indignation of African leaders against the Rhodesian government, which symbolizes a white minority rule determined to deny civil rights to the African majority, while at the same time we avoid making statements which might result in the expulsion of our missionaries from Rhodesia. Their ministry is more needed than ever in that land. We must maintain our neutral position on political issues, even though it might at times involve silence on what some would regard as basic human rights.⁴⁴

Goerner was acknowledging his mission's sympathy with African resistance even as he was insisting on the importance of missionaries keeping their silence on these matters in order to continue their evangelistic, medical, and educational work with Africans in Rhodesia.

In response to UDI the United Nations Security placed an embargo on 90% of Rhodesian exports and forbade UN member nations from selling oil, arms, automobiles, and airplanes to Smith's regime. The UN resolution failed to punish nations that violated the sanctions, and so Rhodesia continued to import and export a limited number of items

⁴³ FMB Minutes, Jan. 10, 1963

⁴⁴ FMB Minutes, Dec. 9, 1965.

through South Africa.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Southern Baptist missionaries experienced the consequences of Rhodesia's handicapped economy. One problem was the rationing of gasoline. Because the missionaries worked with Africans but lived in the areas designated for whites, they had to traverse long distances. Possibly an indication of their favorable status with the Rhodesian government, the missionaries were "granted additional fuel beyond the normal ration, because of the nature of their work and the fact that their normal purchases have been higher than that of the average citizen."⁴⁶ While international sanctions created some inconveniences for the Southern Baptist mission, the Rhodesian government's Manpower Registration Act threatened them with larger consequences. The Registration Act required all white males residing in Rhodesia to register with the government in case the escalating violence made a military draft necessary. This new situation made it even more difficult for missionaries to maintain their political neutrality, for as much as they were willing to comply with the Rhodesian government, joining the Rhodesian Army to defend white rule would have disastrous consequences for their mission work and possibly their personal safety. Alan Scot Willis describes the Southern Baptists' solution:

The missionaries, except for Clyde Dotson and Sam Cannata, signed the registration forms, but they sent a letter of protest saying they were not signing voluntarily. They signed only so that the mission could remain open in Rhodesia. They hoped that their letter would minimize the image of their cooperation with the Smith government and lessen the damage that might be done to their work with the Africans.⁴⁷

The missionaries were never called into military service, but the Manpower Registration Act did challenge the Southern Baptists' notion that they could remain politically neutral while maintaining their work with the African population.

⁴⁵ "Sanctions Against Rhodesia," *Time*, Friday Dec. 23, 1966.

⁴⁶ FMB Minutes, Feb 10, 1966.

⁴⁷ Willis, 91.

Despite the fact that Rhodesia was now a rogue nation whose commitment to white rule ostracized it from the international community, Southern Baptist missionaries continued to expand their work among Africans. By May of 1966 missionaries were making plans for the construction of a new publishing house in Bulawayo, a radio and television studio in Salisbury, and a hostel for missionary children in Gwelo.⁴⁸ The MK (Missionary Kid) hostel allowed missionary children to live within “easy walking distance of one of the best high schools in the country,” while their parents conducted mission work throughout Rhodesia.⁴⁹ Both the publishing house and the studio were completed by the beginning of 1968, allowing Southern Baptists to expand their use of radio, television, and print media. The Rhodesia Baptist Mission used all of these resources to conduct a nation-wide Special Evangelistic Campaign in August and September of 1968.⁵⁰

By far the most sensational aspect of the campaign was the presence of Dr. S.M. Lockridge, a black American preacher invited to Rhodesia by the missionaries and the Foreign Mission Board. Reverend Lockridge was the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church of San Diego and was affiliated with the National Baptist Convention of America.⁵¹ Thoroughly evangelical, Lockridge was also a committed integrationist with active memberships in the NAACP and the Urban League. While these credentials identified him as a moderate among African Americans, in the midst of Southern Baptists Lockridge was an anomaly. Yet his dynamic preaching style, his evangelical theology,

⁴⁸ FMB Minutes, May 12, 1966.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Feb. 8, 1968.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Oct. 7, 1968.

⁵¹ Controversies in National Baptist Convention over funds and ownership of the publishing board and the mission board resulted in a split in 1919. This split produced the National Baptist Convention, USA and the National Baptist Convention of America. The NBC of America represented a smaller number of African American Baptist churches and was more aligned with white Evangelical Protestants in theology and style.

and his call for racial integration made him a popular speaker for Southern Baptist leaders. Lockridge was invited to speak to Southern Baptists in California, Texas, and Florida, and gave addresses at the Home Missionary Conference in 1967 and the annual national convention in 1969.⁵² As an African American traveling around Rhodesia in the late sixties, Rev. Lockridge attracted much attention from whites and blacks in Rhodesia, including appearances on Rhodesian national television. As a Southern Baptist reporter described one such appearance: “Television in Rhodesia is on only in the evening, from 5:00 until 10:00 P.M. and everybody in the country sets aside everything else for it. Therefore, the 7:00 to 7:15 video appearance of the visiting American preacher gave him entrée to the largest possible audience.”⁵³ Like most people in Rhodesia, the television reporter was more interested in Rev. Lockridge’s view of the United States than his work in Rhodesia. When the reporter asked about racial violence and disturbances in U.S. cities Lockridge replied, “Yes, they go on there like they do in Rhodesia and elsewhere.” But when asked what his church did “to help bring about law and order,” Lockridge simply stated, “We preach Jesus, and that is our only hope.”⁵⁴

Rev. Lockridge’s television interview provided more publicity for the Special Evangelistic Crusade, and even attracted the attention of Ian Smith. According to the FMB’s monthly publication *The Commission*, Smith’s chauffeur was a “colored man belonging to a Baptist church for people of his ethnic group.” After he saw the television interview he told Smith about Lockridge.⁵⁵ Lockridge recounted his meeting with the maligned leader of Rhodesia,

⁵² “Audiences in Rhodesia,” *The Commission*, February 1969, Inside cover – 2.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid. “Colored” here refers to those of mixed race in Rhodesia who were distinct from blacks or Africans.

He came to us and welcomed us... He said he was glad to have us in the country of Rhodesia, and he asked us our mission there. We said we were there in these crusades, and he wished us well. It was quite a pleasant visit, certainly in light of the fact that we had been told by many people that he would not receive us.⁵⁶

Quickly becoming a celebrity, Lockridge went on to preach at evangelistic rallies in Salisbury, Gatooma, and Bulawayo.

Rev. Lockridge's interactions with Africans in Rhodesia reveal more nuances in the relationship between Southern Baptist missionaries and African Baptists. Along with the large rallies, which were attended mostly by Africans, Lockridge also met with small groups of African Baptists. When he met with a Women's Missionary Union group they questioned him about the sincerity of the missionaries and asked him how he was treated back home. Lockridge recalled the conversation:

Of course my answer was, "They treat me like I'm a human being, like anybody else who is in my position." They asked me if I thought the Southern Baptist Convention would send a Negro as a missionary, and I was happy to tell them the Southern Baptist Convention has sent one already, to Nigeria. I went on to say that the mere fact I'm here is an indication that they will. "The Southern Baptist Convention sent me over here." They went on to say, "We are glad to receive you because you are one of us, and when you get back home tell other people to pray for us." We were having a really frank conversation until [the white missionary] walked in; then they got back into the usual vein.⁵⁷

Lockridge's tour of Rhodesia and his presence as an African-American Baptist clearly reveal the skepticism with which at least some African Baptists viewed the white missionaries.

Though racial tensions were still apparent in the Baptist Mission in 1968, the FMB and the missionaries viewed Lockridge's trip to Rhodesia as an unqualified success. Dr. Goerner reported to the FMB that the Special Evangelistic Campaign "resulted in a genuine spiritual revival within the churches of the Rhodesia Baptist Convention, which

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid..

may have made a significant impact upon the nation as a whole.”⁵⁸ One clear sign of success for the missionaries was the number of conversions, and Goerner reported over 500 in Gatooma alone. Yet just as important was the racial reconciliation that Lockridge and the campaign created:

Even more gratifying than the statistical results in terms of conversions and rededications is the evidence that there has been a spiritual breakthrough resulting in the solution of some grievous problems which have plagued the Rhodesia mission for the past two or three years. Because of the racial policies of the Rhodesian government which make it difficult for white missionaries to have full (sic) freedom in working with the black Africans, and because of a resolute policy on the part of the Rhodesian mission to encourage self-support in the churches and to reduce mission subsidies, there had been strained relations between the Baptist Convention and the Baptist Mission. What many hours of negotiation and discussion had been unable to achieve, an outpouring of spiritual power has accomplished, as pastors and missionaries have worked together in the fullest of Christian fellowship and brotherhood in a genuine soul-winning effort.⁵⁹

Though racial tensions never disappeared, the evangelistic crusade and the presence of Rev. Lockridge seemed to result in a new commitment to cooperation. The FMB was so pleased with the result of Lockridge’s visit to Rhodesia that they sent him to preach in evangelistic campaigns in the Caribbean, Southeast Asia, and Hong Kong.⁶⁰

In June of 1969 the eligible voters in Rhodesia approved a plan to establish Rhodesia as an independent republic and to draft a new constitution that would continue to preserve white rule. The existing system mandated educational, income, and property requirements. While not explicitly racial, less than 7,000 of the 4.8 million blacks in Rhodesia were eligible to vote. While these requirements also restricted some whites from voting, the results were not as severe. Of the 228,000 whites over 80,000 were qualified voters.⁶¹ Voters overwhelmingly approved Smith’s plan to discard the Union

⁵⁸ FMB Minutes. Oct. 7, 1968.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., May 5, 1969; Oct. 12, 1970; Mar. 8, 1977.

⁶¹ “Smith Victorious in Rhodesia Vote,” *New York Times*, 21 June 1969, p. 9.

Jack and the British national anthem and to establish a new republic founded on an apartheid system. The new constitution removed all voting requirements but separated blacks and whites into two different constituencies. Eventually the 4.8 million blacks could be given 50 seats in parliament, the same number given to white voters. However, this new parliamentary “parity” would be gradually introduced and only if blacks paid a proportionate share of taxes.⁶² The new constitution was designed to ensure stability and prosperity based on a rigid system of racial segregation. Goerner noted that the new constitution “may further complicate the difficulties of missionaries with white skin who are seeking to work among the black people of Rhodesia,” but somewhat optimistically concluded, “Despite a somber shadow cast by the race problem, encountered in various forms in this part of Africa, especially in the emerging Republic of Rhodesia, prospects seem bright for continued growth of our Baptist constituency.”⁶³

Embedded in the new constitution was the Land Tenure Act. Effective as of March 2, 1970, the act divided the land in Rhodesia between blacks and whites and prohibited interracial meetings unless registered and approved of by the government. Church leaders and missionaries throughout Rhodesia strongly resisted the act, which denied churches the right to integrate their own institutions including hospitals and schools, unless the government approved. The most vocal critic of the Land Tenure Act was the Roman Catholic Bishop, Donal Raymond Lamont. Roman Catholics comprised ten percent of Rhodesia’s total population and operated 820 schools and educated roughly 4,500 whites and 150,000 Africans.⁶⁴ The church issued a 56 page booklet protesting the new constitution and the Land Tenure Act, saying “the Government, in direct

⁶² “Republic to be Proclaimed,” *New York Times*, 22 June 22 1969, p. 15.

⁶³ FMB Minutes. June 26, 1969; Aug. 18, 1969.

⁶⁴ “Challenge by the Church in Rhodesia,” *New York Times*, 3 May 1970, p. 171.

contradiction of Christian teaching, has entrenched separation and discrimination,” and, “the church refuses to behave as if it approved of or acquiesced in racial discrimination.”⁶⁵ A few weeks later, on April 28, representatives from eleven different churches including, the Baptist Mission, met together to discuss their response. All the groups decided to join the Catholic Church in its non-compliance and issued the following statement,

We affirm that the new Constitution and the land tenure act cannot be reconciled with the Christian faith, since they entrench separation and discrimination, solely on the basis of race. The Christian responsibility to love accepts no barriers and cannot be defined or restricted by legislation. We affirm that the church intends to carry on its work in areas of either race and with such occupation by either race as the work requires.⁶⁶

This organized act of non-compliance signified a new willingness on the part of Southern Baptist missionaries to join others who openly protested the Rhodesian government.

Like the Roman Catholics, the FMB and its missionaries had built up church and mission institutions which could be rendered ineffective by the new law, and according to Goerner, compliance on this issue “would make serious problems for mission work.”

The resistance compelled the government to alter its policy, which it did by exempting churches from this law.⁶⁷ By July Goerner was able to report, “It now appears that our Baptist missionary work can continue very much as it has been conducted in the past.

The Baptist Mission is not required to register with the government, as had been previously reported.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ “Catholics Assail Rhodesia on Race,” *New York Times*, 8 April 1970, p. 11.

⁶⁶ “Christian Churches Defying Rhodesia on Race Barriers,” *New York Times*, 29 April 1970, p. 9. The eleven groups represented were Roman Catholic, Anglican, Salvation Army, Evangelical Lutheran, African Reformed, Methodist and United Methodist, United Congregational and Presbyterian, the Baptist Mission, and the United Church of Christ.

⁶⁷ FMB Minutes. July 30, 1970.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

In 1970 the Baptist Mission organized another evangelistic crusade which resulted in over three thousand professions of faith.⁶⁹ Though Southern Baptists often preached their message of salvation to segregated audiences, they also believed racial integration was evidence of their faith's ability to change hearts and minds in Rhodesia. In 1970 Goerner reported, "The rally held for English-speaking congregations was particularly significant, in that it proved to be definitely interracial in character, with Africans, Asians, and Europeans mingling together in a spirit-filled session. This was unusual and significant for Rhodesia with its pattern of segregation."⁷⁰ While the missionaries kept silent their opposition to segregation, they were willing to praise instances of integration.

In May of 1970 the secretary of the Rhodesia Baptist Mission announced to his fellow missionaries that, "our Mission is standing on the brink of radical change. Let us be willing to embrace all that the Holy Spirit would change in our methods, policies or stations. Any change that would multiply our effectiveness, that is, touch more lives, occupy more territory or communicate with more people, should be welcome."⁷¹ The seventies did bring radical change to Rhodesia, but much of it challenged the Mission's effectiveness.

The most dramatic change of the decade was the escalation of violence into a civil war between the Rhodesian government and African nationalists. Since the mid-sixties ZAPU and ZANU had been engaged in military training and organizing. ZANU organized the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), and ZAPU ran the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA). Both groups had engaged in sporadic border skirmishes with the Rhodesian army, but in December of 1972 ZANLA

⁶⁹ Ibid., Dec. 10, 1970.

⁷⁰ Ibid., Oct. 12, 1970.

⁷¹ RMBR, 1970.

initiated an intensified conflict known as the Chimurenga War.⁷² Operating along the border of Mozambique, ZANLA members used rocket launchers and mines to attack the white owned Altena Farm a few days before Christmas. Two days later they attacked another farm. White farmers in the region quickly moved into cities, and Rhodesian security forces began operations to hunt down the guerrilla fighters.⁷³ ZIPRA also made attacks along the Zambian border, and Ian Smith made moves to strengthen the Rhodesian Army in preparation of a protracted conflict.

Between 1973 and 1976 much of the fighting was confined to Rhodesia's border regions, and the Baptist Mission continued its work among Africans in the urban areas and at Sanyati Reserve. The Mission and the FMB continued to organize evangelistic campaigns, and in 1974 "Baptist churches baptized more new converts than during any previous year of their history," including "4,545 first-time professions of faith in Christ."⁷⁴ Again, Southern Baptists were encouraged by the interracial character of their work in the midst of continuing racial tensions. A highlight of the 1974 campaign was Miss Malvie Lee Giles, a black American singer and teacher from Los Angeles who performed in a white church before an integrated audience of "Europeans, Africans, Colored, and Negroes."⁷⁵ In 1976 the FMB sent sixteen pastors and denominational workers to Rhodesia to conduct a stewardship crusade in the 66 Baptist churches, which

⁷² David Martin and Phyllis Johnson, *The Struggle for Zimbabwe: The Chimurenga War* (Boston: Faber, 1981), xvi-xvii.

According to Martin and Johnson, after Zimbabwe's independence the beginning of the Second Chimurenga War was determined to be April 28, 1966. "Chimurenga" can be translated to mean revolution, struggle, resistance, or liberation. The first Chimurenga took place in the 1890s as Africans resisted white settlers efforts to occupy the land.

⁷³ Martin, 73-74. "A Farm in Rhodesia Struck by Guerrillas," 24 December 1972, p. 9. "Rhodesians Fear Guerrilla Drive," *New York Times*, 7 January 1973, p. 10.

⁷⁴ FMB Minutes, Jan. 14, 1975.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

was “very timely in the light of the uncertainties for the future.”⁷⁶ The goal of these stewardship campaigns was to encourage financial independence in African churches.

While the work of Southern Baptist missionaries went relatively unharmed in the early years of the Chimurenga War, the escalation of violence and the radicalization of the African population made Rhodesia a dangerous place for anyone to live in the late seventies, let alone white American southerners. One of the key developments in the war was the fall of Portuguese colonial rule in Angola and Mozambique. Portuguese and South African support had been key to white Rhodesia’s economic and military viability. In April 1974 a coup in Lisbon resulted in the end of Portuguese colonial rule in Southern Africa. Both Angola and Mozambique quickly came under the rule of left-wing African nationalists, Rhodesia no longer functioned as a strategic buffer zone for South Africa’s leaders. Concerned with preserving their own system of apartheid, South Africa had a strong interest in securing favorable relations with neighboring countries. After the collapse of the Portuguese colonies, South Africa’s Prime Minister John Vorster believed majority rule in Rhodesia was inevitable, and that the instability of Ian Smith’s government was less preferable to a stable black government.⁷⁷

Vorster along with Kenneth Kaunda, Zambia’s president, pressured Smith to make concessions to African nationalists with the hope of settling the Rhodesian civil war. As a result, Smith released Mugabe and Nkomo in December of 1974, who had been imprisoned then for more than ten years. While Nkomo entered into negotiations with Smith, Mugabe fled to Mozambique, managing to escape from the pursuit of the Rhodesian military by relying on the help of a white Catholic nun. From Mozambique

⁷⁶ Ibid., Sep. 13, 1976.

⁷⁷ Meredith, 319-328.

Mugabe began launching more attacks against white Rhodesians. When Nkomo's efforts at negotiations failed, he went to Zambia, where he opened a second guerrilla front. International peace conferences in 1975 and 1976 failed to reach an agreement, and Smith began to negotiate with Abel Muzorewa, a moderate nationalist leader and a Methodist bishop. But the strategy of the radical nationalists made it impossible for Smith to achieve his goal of a moderate compromise. By 1976 African nationalist armies, including ZANLA and ZIPRA, moved beyond the border regions and initiated battle fronts deep within Rhodesia.⁷⁸

As military conflict escalated, the position of Southern Baptist missionaries became even more complicated. As white residents of Rhodesia, the missionaries were again threatened with the possibility of being drafted into military service. Ten years earlier the Manpower Registration Act made the missionaries themselves eligible for the draft, but the new law made missionary children eligible for military service. Dr. Davis Saunders, the new FMB Secretary for Eastern and Southern Africa made a trip to Rhodesia to deal with the "urgent situation." He reported,

The missionaries were concerned with the proposed passing of a new law which would require the sixteen-year-old missionary sons to register for service with the Rhodesian government. Such registration would make them liable to being drafted on their eighteenth birthday, or even earlier, and would make their leaving the country to avoid serving in the Rhodesian armed forces very difficult.⁷⁹

The anticipation of the law, as it turned out, caused more problems than its implementation. Dr. Saunders and a missionary, Dr. Marion Fray, "had a conference with the under-secretary for manpower which resulted in a clarification and re-interpretation of draft policy of the government with reference to missionaries." After this meeting the FMB and the Baptist Mission concluded, "At present we do not

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ FMB Minutes, Sept. 13, 1976.

anticipate that the drafting of our personnel will be seriously considered, nor do we anticipate that missionary children will be as severely restricted in their residence plans as seemed to be the case recently.”⁸⁰ Again, Rhodesian law and policy created a number of problems for Southern Baptist missionaries, but because they were white the missionaries were able to maintain a degree of freedom in their work. During the last half of the seventies, leading up to the end of white rule, the biggest threat to Southern Baptist mission work in Rhodesia came from African nationalist guerrillas. As a result, Southern Baptist missionaries were confined to the closely guarded urban areas, and African Baptists assumed the leadership of mission work in rural areas. Though Africans had long staffed Baptist mission schools and hospitals, these black Baptists were the ones who kept mission work functioning during the last half of Rhodesia’s civil war.

On February 6, 1977, seven Catholic missionaries were machine-gunned to death in Musami, Rhodesia. Witnesses and two missionary survivors identified the attackers as armed black nationalists who spoke Shona. Because the attack took place near the Mozambique border, it was widely believed that ZANU (or ZANLA) was responsible for the massacre. Two months previously a lone attacker shot a Catholic bishop and two missionaries who were traveling in an isolated area of southwest Rhodesia. The February attack at Musami took place on the Tribal Trust Lands, which were rural areas where few whites lived. Like white farmers, white missionaries who operated in the rural areas of Rhodesia now seemed to be vulnerable, as they were specifically targeted by some nationalist guerrillas.⁸¹ At the advice of the Rhodesian Baptist Convention, missionaries

⁸⁰ Ibid., April 18, 1977.

⁸¹ “Catholic Missions of Rhodesia: A Major Role Since Colonial Era, *New York Times*, 8 February 1977, p. 8.

evacuated the Sessami Station in Gokwe and relocated to the Sanyati Reserve.⁸² Though white missionaries left most rural areas in Rhodesia, African Baptists continued to run schools and hospitals in their absence.

The Internal Settlement Agreement of March 1978 appeared to provide a framework for transition to majority rule in Rhodesia. The Agreement provided for a transitional government with Smith as Prime Minister but with Africans, led by Bishop Abel Muzorewa, increasingly taking control of government. Though Smith agreed to African majority rule, Mugabe and Nkomo rejected the negotiations and continued to engage in guerrilla warfare with Rhodesian military forces. In opposition to Bishop Muzorewa and other moderate nationalists, Mugabe and Nkomo founded the Patriotic Front, a coalition of African nationalist groups including ZANU and ZAPU.

On June 15, 1978 the Southern Baptist missionaries suffered their first casualty of Rhodesia's civil war. While working at the Sanyati Reserve, missionary Archie Dunaway was bayoneted four times and found dead the next morning. Dunaway was 57 and had spent thirty years as a missionary in Nigeria and Rhodesia. Immediately after Dunaway's death all missionary staff were evacuated from Sanyati and "were to remain in residence within the urban areas."⁸³ A Baptist editor in America eulogized, "Undoubtedly Archie was a symbol of rulers whom the killers hated and despised. They killed him because they couldn't kill those stronger than him. It mattered not that he loved and worked for them."⁸⁴

"7 White Missionaries in Rhodesia Slain in Raid by Black Guerrillas," *New York Times*, 8 February 1977, p. 1.

⁸² FMB Minutes, April 18, 1977.

⁸³ Ibid., June 27, 1978; July 25, 1978. "Rhodesia Mission Decides to Keep Ministries Open," *The Commission*, Sept. 1978, 25.

⁸⁴ Albert McClellan. "Editorials," *The Baptist Program*, August 1978.

The immediate effect on the Baptist Mission was the downsizing of personnel working in Rhodesia. While some missionaries were relocated to urban areas, others were sent to neighboring countries or back to the United States on early furlough. Two missionary couples requested reassignment outside of Rhodesia and another couple left the country on a leave of absence. Eight journeymen, or short term missionaries, had been assigned to Rhodesia, but six were reassigned and two withdrew from the program. At the request of the Rhodesia Baptist Convention, the mission kept Sanyati Reserve open, but missionary involvement was minimized. The only other Baptist Mission institution in rural Rhodesia was the seminary, which experienced similar changes as Sanyati: "The missionary staff at the seminary have all moved to Gwelo and are currently traveling to and from the seminary during daylight hours to conduct classes. The two African staff members at the seminary have assumed added responsibilities for the functioning of the seminary and the camp during the absence of the missionaries."⁸⁵

Archie Dunaway was one of fifteen white missionaries killed in June of 1978. A few days after the attack at Sanyati, guerrillas brutally killed eight British Pentecostal missionaries and four children at a mission school in Vumba. On June 27 two German Jesuit missionaries were shot at their remote hospital station ninety miles outside of Salisbury. The violence continued, and in January two more Jesuit missionaries were abducted and murdered. In all thirty-two white missionaries and four of their children were killed since between 1976 and 1979, nineteen of them Roman Catholic.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ FMB Minutes, July 25, 1978; Jan. 9, 1978.

⁸⁶ "12 White Teachers and Children Killed by Guerrillas in Rhodesia," *New York Times*, 25 June 1978, p. 1.

"Two German Jesuits are Slain in Rhodesia," *New York Times*, 29 June 1978, p. A14.

"Rhodesian Guerrillas are Blamed in 2d Missionary Killing in Week," *New York Times*, 4 January 1979, p. A2.

Determining who was responsible for the attacks on missionaries became an important battleground for black and white political leaders in Rhodesia. Based on the testimony of missionary survivors and African witnesses, it was universally accepted that the attackers were black guerrillas. The Rhodesian government regularly insisted that the guerrillas were part of Robert Mugabe's Patriotic Front.. At times the guerrillas addressed crowds of African bystanders and appeared to take credit for these killings.⁸⁷ The government also made the scenes of the brutal killings open to international reporters, seizing the opportunity to portray Mugabe and other nationalists as radical, violent, and unfit to rule. After the February, 1977 killing of seven Catholic missionaries the Information Ministry in Salisbury organized a bus trip to the scene for about twenty reporters. John F. Burns, special reporter to the *New York Times*, reported the scene at St. Paul's Mission at Musami:

Police Superintendent John Potter showed the spot where the missionaries had been slain. Despite the overnight rain, bloodstains were still visible, indicating that the missionaries had been standing in an uneven line across the 12-foot road when the shooting started. Superintendent Potter, pointing to indentations in the ground where the victims had fallen, said it appeared that the guerrillas had approached the bodies after the initial volley and fired down at them. Later the reporters watched as the bodies, in white plastic bags, were carried on stretchers to a police van from a guest house where they had been kept overnight. While the dead were being put aboard two middle-aged black men broke into sobs and clutched at Father Myerscough. He attempted to console them.⁸⁸

Again, after the killing of the eight Pentecostal missionaries the *New York Times* reported that, "The Rhodesian Government made certain that the world's press would fully report this horror. The dozen corpses were left where they fell, the clubs and axes that killed them still bloody, until reporters and photographers arrived on special flights."⁸⁹ The *Times* also eloquently explained why the Rhodesian government and African nationalists

⁸⁷ "Missionaries in Rhodesia Increasingly Imperiled by Guerrilla Violence," *New York Times*, 28 June 1978, p. A8.

⁸⁸ "7 White Missionaries Slain".

⁸⁹ "The Killings in Rhodesia," *New York Times*, 27 June 1978, p. A14.

were concerned with the killing of innocent missionaries: “As for the guerrillas, they ought to understand that a moral claim to power is all that sustains their movement in the eyes of the world. Terrible acts like Friday’s killings will poison opinion against their Patriotic Front and make insupportable any thought of Western assistance to a future Zimbabwe it might lead.”⁹⁰ If Smith and other white Rhodesians could deny the moral authority of the Patriotic Front they could legitimize their own negotiations with moderate African nationalists.

Mugabe and Nkomo responded by condemning the killings and accusing the Rhodesian government of hiring a black militia to conduct the massacres and discredit the Patriotic Front. A number of missionaries believed that the attackers were associated with the Patriotic Front, but that the attacks had neither been ordered or approved by Mugabe or Nkomo. A Catholic missionary “believed that the decision to kill the white staff members had been made, if not spontaneously, then at least at the level of the local guerrilla commanders.”⁹¹ What was apparent was that white missionaries were being used by both sides fighting Rhodesia’s civil war. African nationalist guerrillas, connected to PF leaders or not, used the deaths of white missionaries to intimidate other whites in Rhodesia, possibly hoping that the escalation of violence would cause a white exodus, weakening the government’s backing. The Rhodesian government used these same deaths to vilify African nationalists and create national and international sympathy for a more gradual transition to majority rule.

In April of 1979 Rhodesia, now known as Rhodesia-Zimbabwe, held its first elections in which an African majority was eligible to vote. Bishop Muzorewa and his

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ “Missionaries in Rhodesia Increasingly Imperiled by Guerrilla Violence.”

party won the elections with a substantial majority, and Ian Smith left his position as prime minister a month later. But the presence of Muzorewa's new black led government failed to bring about peace, as Nkomo and Mugabe accused Muzorewa of collusion and announced their determination to fight against the new government just as they had fought against Smith's regime.⁹²

This last phase of the civil war severely limited the mission work African Baptists were carrying out in rural areas. Just after Easter of 1979 guerrillas visited the Sessami Reserve located near the Zambian border and forced the African staff and students to flee, and then proceeded to burn the mission facilities.⁹³ On August 10, 1979 another group of twelve to fifteen guerrillas visited Sanyati Reserve, "talked to staff and students, and told them that the school would not be allowed to operate after that week, which was the end of the term. ...Meanwhile, the guerrillas said that they wished the hospital at Sanyati to continue operating."⁹⁴ The manager of the Sanyati Reserve who was also a deacon and lay preacher disappeared a month before the cease-fire.⁹⁵ While it became nearly impossible to continue Baptist work in the rural areas, the Rhodesia Baptist Mission, "with the strong backing of the leadership of the national convention," requested additional missionaries for Rhodesia. "These requests are for assignments in the urban areas which are more easily controlled by security measures than are the rural areas."⁹⁶ While white missionaries focused on urban areas, the Baptist Mission transferred much of the rural work to Africans and the RBC. After the April elections the Baptist Mission

⁹² Meredith, 324-325.

⁹³ "Zimbabwe: Faith Survives the 'Hard Times,'" *The Commission*, May 1981, 7-12.

⁹⁴ FMB Minutes, Sept. 11, 1979.

⁹⁵ "Zimbabwe: Faith Survives the 'Hard Times.'"

⁹⁶ Ibid.

reported, “While rural areas of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia are torn by war, Baptist churches in urban areas are flourishing, and African leadership is emerging rapidly.”⁹⁷

Continuing violence in Rhodesia-Zimbabwe indicated the failure of the Internal Settlement, and as a result of regional and international pressure, Nkomo, Mugabe, and Muzorewa convened in London to discuss terms of peace. After months of negotiations, an agreement was reached and signed on December 21, 1979. The London agreement called for an interim British government to control Rhodesia-Zimbabwe and act as intermediary between rival political groups until elections could be held in the spring of 1980. Robert Mugabe and his ZANU(PF) party won 63 percent of the vote and 57 of the 80 black seats in parliament, signaling a resounding victory. On April 18, 1980 Zimbabwe, under majority rule and Mugabe’s leadership, became an independent nation.⁹⁸

During the transition to Zimbabwe’s independence, the Baptist missionaries urged Southern Baptists back home to pray for election results that “will produce a political climate in which the Word of God can continue to be preached and Christians can exercise freedom to worship and witness.”⁹⁹ Like western diplomats and white settlers, Baptists preferred anyone to lead Zimbabwe over Mugabe, an avowed Marxist. But Mugabe’s conciliatory tone and calls for moderation were a surprise to many, and along with white settlers, Southern Baptists were permitted to continue working and saving souls in Zimbabwe.

Southern Baptist missionaries spent thirty years spreading their faith in white-ruled Rhodesia. Throughout this period the mission successfully avoided confrontation

⁹⁷ “News About Missions,” *The Commission*, May 1979.

⁹⁸ Meredith, 325-328.

⁹⁹ *The Commission*, January 1980, back cover.

with the Rhodesian government and converted Africans to their faith and their denominational work. For Southern Baptists, this balancing act had been a success. In balancing their commitments to evangelism, law and order, and racial equality, the thirty year history consistently points to evangelism and conversion as the primary concern of Baptist missionaries. Only when Rhodesian law threatened this commitment did the Baptist Mission protest against white authorities. Rarely did the missionaries challenge the racist policies of the Rhodesian government. By placing their commitment to law and order above racial equality, Baptists applied an evangelistic pragmatism that allowed them freedom to live in Rhodesia and “witness” to the majority African population.

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