
The Church divided based on ethnicity: An analysis of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) structures in Malawi

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Abstract

The revival of ethnic ties and nationalism around the world is not simply the reaction to the plural nature of most societies, but stems from the fact that, unlike class, ethnicity combines affections with material, political and economic interests. Ethnic identity and relations naturally exist whether the ethnic groups are competing or not. The first challenge of the early church in the New Testament was to deal with ethnicity and ethnic divisions between Jews and Gentiles. Contemporary churches are in a serious dilemma as they struggle to understand their archaic church polities and orders in their own challenging context. Reformed church polity perspective must submit to the Headship of Christ, embracing all Scriptural principles guided by the Spirit so that order, discipline and justice are maintained for the proper running of the church.

Key words:

Ethnicity, ethnic groups, boundary, diversity, Presbyterian, hierarchical, Reformed church polity.

1. Introduction

Ethnicity and ethnic divisions exist in the church and church structures in Malawi because of the legacy of tradition, colonialism and dictatorship¹. Ethnicity, tribalism and xenophobia can be found inside and outside church walls². There are millions of people whose lives are characterized by instability in an often chaotic world. The chapters of their lives consist of people disappointing them through unfortunate behaviours such as ethnic marginalization, stigmatization, racism, insults, xenophobia, and other cultural aggravations³.

2. Definition of terms

According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*⁴, the word “ethnic” (adjective) means connected with, belonging to nation, tribe, race, or people that share a cultural tradition. “Ethnicity” is defined as the fact of belonging to a particular race or tribe: many important factors may be related for example class, gender, age and ethnicity. Jenkins⁵ holds that “ethnicity” or the word “ethnic” comes from the Ancient Greek word *ethnikos*, a people, a collectivism of humans living and acting together in a distinct culture.

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1. Kaspin, D. 1995. The Politics of Ethnicity in Malawi's Democratic Transition. *Journal of Modern African Studies*. Vol. 33: No 4:595-620. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
 2. Prill, T. 2013. *Migrants, Strangers and the Church in Southern Africa: A Biblical Perspective*. NETS Theological Research Papers – Volume two. Norderstedt: GRIN.
 3. Walden, K.J. 2015. *Practical Theology for Church Diversity: An Experienced Guide for Clergy and Churches*. Eugene: Cascade Books.
 4. Hornby, A.S. & Turnbull, J. 2010. *Ethnicity. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. Oxford: Oxford University.
 5. Jenkins, R. 1997. *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations*. London: Saga.

3. Research problem

Many denominations and local churches are organized along ethnic/tribal lines in Africa including Malawi⁶. One of the main historical reasons is that Western Missionaries tended to work in specific regions and focused on particular ethnic language groups⁷. The research problem of the study will be to investigate and examine whether ethnic division in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) and its structures in Malawi can be illuminated to give insights into its history, causes, nature, impact and eventually its dissolution. The purpose of the study is to explore and describe to what extent and how the structural divisions in the CCAP based on ethnicity can be assessed from a Reformed Church polity perspective. The main questions will be: What are the reasons for structural divisions based on ethnicity in the CCAP? How can the question of ethnicity and ethnic divisions be resolved in the contemporary church? How should ethnic diversity be accommodated in the church today?

This article will also analyse the centralized ethnic based church system in Malawi and contribute new theological approaches to the current debate on ecclesiastical church polity discourse in the diverse contemporary church. The research study will benefit the church in the sense that the results of the research will give church members some relevant theological knowledge, guidance and answers to the complex challenges such as poverty, idolatry, ethnic divisions, lust, and many nationalistic cravings today. It is expected that this research study will stimulate a call for change on the method of evangelization and system of government in the contemporary church in Malawi.

4. Methodology of the research

The method of this article will be purely qualitative and descriptive in Reformed Church perspective approach, to define terms and review some of the concepts widely used by both proponents and opponents of ethnicity and ethnic divisions in the church today.

6 Pohor, R. 2006. *Tribalism, Ethnicity and race, in Africa Bible Commentary*. Adeyemo, T. (Gen. Ed). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

7 Pohor, R. 2006.

This will enable this research to proceed in a more informed way evaluating the tenets of ethnic ideology on the basis of the historical resources and the Scriptures today. In achieving the objectives of this article, intense research was required to find relevant data and the information was obtained from the North West University Theological Library, Blantyre Synod Library, Journals and internet.

5. The influences from European Church Missionaries in Malawi

5.1 Influences from Scotland

The origin of Livingstonia and Blantyre Synods dates back to the 1800s when Rev Dr James Stewart of the Lovedale Mission in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, attended the funeral of David Livingstone in Westminster Abbey in Britain in 1873. According to Sundkler and Steed⁸, the life, work and death of David Livingstone inspired at least three Missions to begin their work in Malawi namely: the Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland and the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA), later called the Anglican Church.

Rev Dr James Stewart felt strongly that launching a mission in Central Africa in memory of Livingstone was imperative and on April 18, 1874 the indelible impression caught fire in his mind. He appealed to the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland to support the noble cause. Rev Dr James Stewart passionately concluded his speech with the following words:

I would humbly suggest, as the truest memorial of Livingstone, the establishment by this church, or several churches together of an institution at once industrial and educational, to teach the truths of the Gospel and the arts of civilized life to the natives of the country, and which shall be placed in a carefully selected and commanding spot in Central Africa, where from its position and capabilities it might grow into a town, and afterwards into a city, and become a great Centre of commerce, civilization and Christianity, and this I would call Livingstonia⁹.

A young ordained medical doctor read the report of Stewart's speech in the newspaper and exclaimed: "There is the very thing I have been preparing for all my life!" When Rev Dr Stewart met him later he thought, "There is the man for us!" His name was Rev Dr Robert Laws, who was to spend

8 Sundkler, B. & Steed, C. 2000. *History of the Church in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.

9 Sundkler, B. & Steed, C. 2000.

over fifty years in Africa. By May 1875 a pioneer party under Edward D. Young, veteran sailor, left for Africa. Other members were Rev Dr Robert Laws, a medical officer, John McFadyen, Allan Simpson, engineers, George Johnston, a carpenter and William Baker, a seaman¹⁰. Henry Henderson who was sent by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to find a suitable site for establishing a mission station also accompanied them¹¹.

In South Africa, Rev Dr Stewart recruited four Xhosa Africans namely Shadrach Mngunana, William Koy, Isaac Wauchope and Mapassa Ntintili to serve as teachers and evangelists¹².

5.1.1 *The Livingstonia Synod*

After some difficult travelling up the Zambezi River and on land they reached the Shire River in Malawi, the country of their destination, and on 12 October 1875 they sailed onto the Lake Malawi itself. Young called for the Old Hundredth (Psalm) to be sung in praise to the Lord their God¹³. They eventually came to drop anchor at Cape Maclear:

“Livingstonia is begun”, wrote Laws, though at present a piece of canvas stretched between two trees is all that stands for the future city of that name¹⁴.

The difficulties of inhospitable climatic conditions, illnesses and deaths of the missionaries forced them to move to Bandawe among the Tonga in the Northern part of Lake Malawi in 1881. An overwhelming response from the lakeside Tonga resulted in church congregations being planted. The earlier “Christian village” program at Bandawe was abandoned and replaced by evangelization and schools in the Tonga villages. The Tonga schools enrolled more than 1 000 students in the 1880s. They moved again to Kondowe in 1884, and Rev Dr Robert Laws named the new mission site “Livingstonia”¹⁵.

10 Selfridge, J. 1976. *The Church's First Thirty Years in Nyasaland (Now Malawi) 1861-1891*. A Thesis, Nkhoma: Nkhoma. Bain.

11 Selfridge, J. 1976.

12 Selfridge, J. 1976.

13 Shepperd, R.H. 1971. *Lovedale South Africa 1824-1955*. Alice: Lovedale.

14 McCracken, J.C. 1977. *Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875-1940: the Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.

15 Sundkler, B. & Steed, C. 2000.

In 1906, the number of pupils had overwhelmingly increased from 107 to over 3 000 pupils¹⁶. According to Velsen¹⁷, the Tongaland was the scene of extraordinary educational enthusiasm, influencing a whole generation to accept modernization and development. Initial results in terms of church baptism and statistics were not impressive. The hold of traditional Tonga religion was very strong and the first converts did not appear until 1889. Chief Mankhambira asked for military help, “effective medicine” to destroy the Ngoni and new economic outlets. They welcomed the Mission’s employment on a wage basis, and the opening of new vistas. It is generally accepted that the Tonga were spared extermination at the hands of the Ngoni by the arrival of the Livingstonia Mission and especially by Rev. Dr Robert Laws’ personal influence on the Ngoni Chief Mbelwa. Dr Laws himself had earlier made a first visit to the Ngoni in September 1876, speaking, he thought, to the Ngoni paramount chief. In reality it was a village headman who received him. Therefore, the approach could not be conclusive. Three months later the Mission sent William Koy, the Xhosa evangelist from Lovedale, who managed to meet with the real paramount ruler Mbelwa. Here was an African leader from the Eastern Cape of Nguni background, speaking the language of the Ngoni Chief. William Koy walked warily, did not begin emphasizing an impending arrival of the white missionaries, but suggested that the king might need a school for the children¹⁸.

A fortnight later Koy returned to Chief Mbelwa, accompanied by Rev Alexander Riddle who showed him the Bible and explained that “it was this that made our nation rich and powerful”. The school was opened and Koy was placed in charge of the school. The children liked their teacher and Chief Mbelwa appreciated the advantage of having schools and missionaries in his kingdom, but only on condition that the Ngonis would have a monopoly¹⁹.

By 1890, there were only 53 communicants in the whole mission, including the Cape Maclear outpost and Ngoniland. The outstanding pioneer missionaries to northern Malawi were Rev Dr Robert Laws; head of “Livingstonia” and one of the great strategists of the Centre

16 Pachai, B. 1973. *Malawi: the History of a nation*. London: Mackintosh.

17 Velsen (in Sundkler, D & Steed, C.) 2000. *History of the Church in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.

18 Sundkler, D & Steed, C. 2000:473-74.

19 Sundkler, D. & Steed, C. 2000.

who led the Mission for fifty years. His fellow Scottish was Rev Dr W A Elmslie, missionary to the Ngoni and the dynamic Donald Fraser who influenced both the Tonga and the Ngoni. Frequent mission expansions were also soon made among the Ngoni in Mzimba, Chewa in Kasungu, Tumbuka in Loudon and Ekwendeni. The Livingstonia Presbytery met for the first time in 1889, marking the first step the Church was taking towards self-sufficiency²⁰.

As a consequence of the exceptional educational response from Tonga, Tumbuka and Ngoni, the Overtoun Institution was opened in Livingstonia Mission in 1894. This school ensured the continued pre-eminence of northern Nyasaland in the field of education. Overtoun Institute had an unashamedly British syllabus with 3 years of English language and literature, British and European history, philosophy, psychology, mathematics, ethics and sociology. Students from this institution made prominence as African intellectuals in Southern Africa²¹.

McCracken²² contends that their education prepared them for the time when Africans would run their own affairs in the church and state as political leaders. This Protestant Livingstonia Mission sent their best men to Bemba in Zambia. In 1895, John Afwenge Banda, Chewa evangelist (father of Dr Hastings Banda, the first President of Malawi) began work at Mwenzo. Having stayed there for many years during the First World War he carried virtually all responsibility for mission work there. A decade later, a Tonga evangelist, David Kaunda (the father of Dr Kenneth Kaunda, the first President of Zambia), followed, building up the Chinsali station and guiding its rapid expansion. The Livingstonia Mission also sent African agents to other missions in the region: the South African General Mission (SAGM), the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), and the London Missionary Society (LMS)²³.

According to the World Atlas of Christian Missions²⁴, Southern Tanzania also received its share, with six teachers going to Moravian Rungwe and another six to the Berlin Lutherans at Illebula. The "seeds" sown at the Overtoun Institution were blown all over East and Central Africa.

20 Thompson, T.J. 1975. *Livingstonia Centenary 1875-1975*. Nkhoma: CLAIM.

21 Weller, J. & Linden, J. 1984. *The Main Stream Christianity to 1980 in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe: From Mission to Church*. Gweru: Mambo Press.

22 McCracken, J.C. 1977.

23 McCracken, J.C. 1977.

24 1911. *World Atlas of Christian Missions*. New York.

In 1910, the Livingstonia Mission, with twelve ordained missionaries and 1 260 unordained African preachers, teachers and Bible women, had a Christian community of 13 000. The Livingstonia Mission remained the sole representative, if not agent of “Pax Britannica”²⁵.

5.1.2 *The Blantyre Synod*

The Church of Scotland group consisting of a medical doctor and five artisans led by Henry Henderson, separated themselves and they went up to Soche, Michiru and Ndirande Hills in search of a site for their mission station among the Yao tribe that would become the Centre for Christian mission, commerce, education and agriculture. Soon the Mission site was identified and named “Blantyre” after the birthplace of Dr David Livingstone on 23rd October 1876²⁶.

The Scottish Missionary beginnings at Blantyre were difficult, dramatic and controversial. In this ethnic Yao dominated area, refugee slaves would turn up, seeking shelter at the missionary’s house. Small communities were established, a motley group of refugees and individuals from varied backgrounds, including educated Kololo. The Mission estates employed them all and at the same time gave them the foundations of an education. In the Mission village they were exempted from the traditional chief’s control. The Mission staff, often European lay artisans, exercised virtual chiefly authority, taking over the role of Magistrate and Civil Governor²⁷.

In one instance during the “Blantyre Atrocities” in 1878, severe disciplinary action led to death. The event was widely publicized and the Mission both in Malawi and in Scotland defended its position with difficulty. The injurious effects of “Social Darwinism” had led to an estrangement between white and black. At this difficult time, the Blantyre Mission was fortunate that it received a new leader, Rev David Clement Scott, one of the outstanding Missionaries of his time (at Blantyre 1881-1897 when he left Malawi for Kenya). Rev David Scott insisted on the David Livingstone heritage, combining “Christianity, Civilization and Commerce”, (popularly known as three CCC), a formula which Scott translated as the “Gospel and Modern Culture” which also meant deep respect for African culture. He and his

25 Sundkler, D & Steed, C. 2000.

26 Selfridge, J. 1976.

27 Weller, J. *et al* 1984.

successor, Alexander Hetherwick²⁸ insisted on generous opportunities for the African co-workers:

Africans as co-inheritors of world culture-in African forms was his educational formula; to make the African a conscious member of the Catholic Church of Christ – his ecclesiastical program.

The church building at Blantyre Mission, the St Michaels and All Angels, was built with the leadership of Rev David Scott and it stands to this day as the inspiring architecture combining Western and Eastern traditions in a beautiful style of its own, “not Scottish, nor English but African”. The school system was well developed with mission stations founded in the districts. Rev David Scott had a gift of encouraging his African co-workers. In 1893, three of his African colleagues Joseph Bismark, Rondau Kaferanjira and Donald Malota became deacons²⁹.

The other notable ones who were ordained were Harry Matecheta, John Gray Kufa and Harry Mtuwa. Scott gave them all tasks to do in which they had responsibility and virtual autonomy, apart from infrequent supervisory visits from missionaries. However, Scott found little support for his “radical views” among European settlers. Scott produced a dictionary of the Chinyanja language that evidenced not only considerable linguistic abilities, but also a deep and sympathetic grasp of African culture.

In contrast to many other British missionaries of the day, Scott’s views on African race and culture were progressive. He opposed certain elements of traditional culture as incompatible with Christianity (e.g. initiation rituals, polygamy) but he did not condemn African customs wholesale. In 1898, he was forced to resign his post probably for health reasons and Alexander Hetherwick, his assistant, assumed leadership. After his furlong in Scotland, Scott proceeded to Kenya where he founded the Kikuyu Mission, now Presbyterian Church in East Africa. Rev David Scott died after he succumbed to thrombosis of the legs in 1907. In 1909, the Blantyre Mission opened the Henry Henderson Institute which became an important facility, training Africans in the same areas as the Overtoun Institute of Livingstonia Mission. The Boarding School for both girls and boys at Blantyre Mission was as prim and proper as any on the continent where emphasis was on English language, mathematics, higher learning and African culture.

28 Weller, J. *et al* 1984.

29 Sundkler, D. & Steed, C. 2000.

In the local congregations, the pastors, elders and evangelists went about doing their tasks³⁰.

A leading personality who then turned a minister was the Rev Harry Kambwiri Matecheta, a Yao connected to the Presbyterian Mission at Blantyre, who served among the Southern Ngoni of Bemvu in Ntcheu for forty years. In 1933 he was elected Moderator of his church. He was ably assisted by his wife. Her last words on her deathbed sum up the faith and aspiration of a whole generation of forgotten women in the church with simple eloquence:

My way is open. I am glad my children are all educated, married and settled. I am not worried. I have done my duty³¹.

Gradually, Blantyre town has grown up around the Mission station and today it is a city of two and a half million inhabitants. It still proudly bears the name of Blantyre City³².

5.1.3 The Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA: Anglican Church)

The Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA), the Anglican Church, which arrived in Malawi earlier in 1861, experienced the tragic losses of its leader, Bishop Mackenzie and others, who died due to malaria soon after arrival at Magomero. The rest left the area and headed for Zanzibar. However, they kept their original destination in mind and in 1879, the Mission returned to work among the Yao in Mangochi. They established their headquarters at Likoma in Lake Malawi³³.

5.1.4 The Roman Catholic Church (RC)

The Lomwe arrived in Malawi in groups (ethnic identities such as Anguru, Makuwa, Ameto, Amuhavani) as refugees running away from wars, slavery and hunger in Mocambique. A study of “Lomwe mentality”, of a refugee people made to feel inferior as a second-class community and anxious to overcome this social handicap would be worthwhile³⁴. According to Linden³⁵, the Mission that came late in 1901 from Europe was the Montfort Fathers of the Roman Catholic Church

30 Sundkler, D. & Steed, C. 2000.

31 Sundkler, D. & Steed, C. 2000.

32 Selfridge, J. 1976.

33 Selfridge, J. 1976.

34 Sundkler, D. & Steed, C. 2000.

(RC) at Nguludi (literally: "Here are genuine Lomwes: Anguru-di"). It was at first less than popular in the established African and European communities, but the combination of the refugee community and the Montfort Fathers was powerful. There was an overwhelming annual increase of 2 000 to 3 000 members baptized. From zero in the 1920s, the membership had in 1970 risen to 180 000 Catholics or 26% of the total population in the district. Dr Ian and Mrs Jane Linden³⁵ writes:

The Catholic Church's neophytes were more than three-quarters new arrivals in the area. The question to Churches in the region was which of them would be mobile enough to meet the needs of these newly arrived groups.

Looking at subsequent developments, he states: "Today the Roman Catholic Church (RC) in the Southern region of Malawi might without exaggeration be called the 'Alomwe Church', with a strong 'Lomwe majority'"³⁶.

5.2 Influences from South Africa

5.2.1 The Nkhoma Synod

The fourth Mission to arrive in Malawi was the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) from Cape Town in South Africa. Rev Andrew C Murray first arrived in Malawi in 1885 and he toured mission fields in which his Synod would work and recommended that "it was time for them to open up a new field"³⁷. After going for further training in Edinburgh in Scotland where he met members of the Livingstonia Mission Committee he went back to South Africa where he was chosen as the first Missionary of the Dutch Reformed Church to go to Malawi. He went to Bandawe on 31st July 1888 where Rev Dr Robert Laws warmly welcomed him. He stayed there for a period of time in order to gain some experience with the Livingstonia Mission while he looked for a suitable site for his own mission³⁸.

In July 1889, Rev TCB Vlok, the second missionary of the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (DRCM), arrived in Malawi. With the help of Rev Murray, Rev Vlok toured the South- West of the lake and on

35 Linden, I & J. 1974. *Catholics, Peasants, and Chewa resistance in Nyasaland 1889-1939*. London: Mackintosh.

36 Schapera, I. ed. 1963. *David Livingstone. Livingstone's African Journal 1853-1856*. 2 Vols. Volume 1: London.

37 Selfridge, J. 1976.

38 Selfridge, J. 1976.

28th November 1889, they chose a new site in the Chewa dominated Central Region near Chiwere's Village and called it "Mvera", (Obedience) in Dowa³⁹. The stations of Livulezi (1896) and Malembo (1895) were taken over from the Livingstonia Mission because they were located south of the 13 degree latitude which was considered the boundary between the Scottish Mission of Livingstonia and the Dutch Mission of Nkhoma.

The work of the Dutch Reformed Mission (DRCM) was under the supervision of the Livingstonia Mission until 1897 when it became independent. The Dutch Reformed Church (DRCM) of the Western Cape soon established the Nkhoma Mission Station at Mvera and drew ethnic boundaries in the Central Region of Malawi in 1889 among the Chewa who took pride of the secret traditional Nyau cult and Ngoni war-like tribes⁴⁰.

Weller and Linden (1984)⁴¹ hold that at the three stations of Mvera, Livulezi and Malembo, the number of Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) Missionaries increased accordingly. They met baffling problems affecting the African population including the hut tax and migrant labour. The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) Missionaries later became advocates for the Africans against the colonial government policies. The effects of migrant labour roused them to imaginative measures in the form of home craft and industries, weekly markets, mass literacy campaigns and emphasis on care of the family. The other emphasis of the Afrikaner Mission was on agriculture; at the same time it was part of the school program to politically resist the English language as far as possible. Every African Christian member at Mvera and Nkhoma was required to have a garden for modern farming⁴².

The Mission played a central role in promoting modern agriculture in the Central Region. The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) was the only church mission in Africa known to introduce its own currency at this time. Money was non-existent and they invented a coin the size of a penny, punched with two holes and stamped "MM," (Mvera Mission). This arrangement came to an end in 1909⁴³.

39 Weller, J. *et al.* 1984.

40 McCracken, J.C. 1977.

41 Weller, J. *et al.* 1984.

42 Sundkler, D. & Steed, D. 2000.

43 Sundkler, D. & Steed, D. 2000.

An impressive African School Inspector, Albert Namalambe, a former slave, eventually looked after a rapidly expanding network of schools⁴⁴. The new centre at Nkhoma Mission soon became a little town with post office, hospital, nurses training college, teachers college, theological college, printing office, carpentry workshop and commercial shop⁴⁵. In 1903 a governing council, the council of congregations, was set up to be responsible for the practical functions of the Presbytery.

The church government of the Nkhoma Synod was said to be Reformed or Presbyterian, in which Jesus Christ alone exercised His rule and authority through His Word and the Holy Spirit, using office-bearers who assembled in formal ecclesiastical assemblies. However, it was characterized by hierarchicalism among office-bearers and assemblies, as well as clericalism, because the church was organized as a top-down system with clerical officers on committees and at Synod level being particularly powerful⁴⁶.

One of the reasons was that the Nkhoma Synod developed the hierarchical system in the context of its geographical landscape, and under the social-political, economic and Christian-ecclesial conditions in which certain aspects were able to influence negatively its polity discourse and practice. In addition, the Nkhoma Synod uncritically imitated ruling systems of society, religious bodies, and other churches such as Scottish Missions, the Nyau secret society and the Malawi State government⁴⁷.

5.3 *The Church co-operation in Malawi*

As early as the 1890s Rev Clement D Scott had suggested that there should be one church for British Central Africa and by 1900 the two Scottish Missionaries were beginning to explore the possibility of a United Presbyterian Church (UPC). In 1903 the Blantyre Presbytery approached Livingstonia Presbytery with the suggestion and proposed that the Creed, Constitution and Canons should be based on those of the Presbyterian Church in India⁴⁸. In the following year further discussions were held during

44 Pauw, C.M. 1980. *Mission and Church in Malawi: the history of the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian*. Th.D thesis. Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch.

45 Pauw, C.M. 1980.

46 Ross, A. 1996. *Blantyre Mission and the Making of Modern Malawi*. Blantyre: Christian Literature Association in Malawi.

47 Msangaambe, C. 2011. *Laitly Empowerment with Regard to the Missional Task of the CCAP*. PhD diss. University of Stellenbosch: Unpublished.

48 Weller, J. *et al.* 1984.

the United Missionary Conference at Mvera Mission in Nkhoma Presbytery. In 1914 the two mother Churches in Scotland were to give permission and plans were made for the union of Livingstonia and Blantyre Presbyteries, but because of the outbreak of the First World War, all advances were postponed (most of the Ministers were busy with army chaplaincy).

When the war ended in 1918 the Missionary Conference was re-arranged for 1924 and it was decided that the New Church would come into being then. The Conference met in September 1924 at Livingstonia and formally constituted the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) General Synod and Rev Dr Robert Laws was elected as its first Moderator⁴⁹. The Nkhoma Presbytery was reluctant to join. It only acted as an observer in the formation of the General Synod, an action which most people still question in terms of the Nkhoma Synod's seriousness in maintaining the new church's policies and decisions to this very day.

Later, after further consultations with the mother body, the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, Nkhoma Synod, joined the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) General Synod in October 1926 during the 50th Anniversary Celebrations of the Blantyre Mission. The areas of co-operation included education and Bible translation. The Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods opted to use ethnic Chichewa as lingua franca while the Livingstonia Synod chose ethnic Tumbuka/Tonga. They also agreed on a joint hymn-book⁵⁰. Other Synods that joined the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) General Synod are Lundazi (Zambia) and Harare (Zimbabwe).

The General Synod (now General Assembly) of the CCAP usually meets once every four years to discuss relevant policy issues pertaining to the promotion of fellowship, unity, development, ecumenism, church and society forum, and the overall spiritual welfare of the entire Presbyterian Churches in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The General Assembly of the CCAP is the highest church court in the organization and order of the Presbyterian System in Central Africa. The office Headquarters are located in Lilongwe, the Capital City of Malawi.

49 Weller, J. *et al.* 1984.

50 Weller, J. *et al.* 1984.

6. Analysis of the ethnicity-based Church system in Malawi

The study will go back to the central question: whether the divisions in the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) on the basis of ethnicity and tribalism in light of the Reformed Church polity are relevant, valid and acceptable. The Reformed Church traditional viewpoint is that legitimate church polity must acknowledge Christ as Head and King of the church. He rules every detail of the life of the church through the Word of God by the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit⁵¹. Koffeman⁵² holds that Calvin, the founder of Reformed church polity maintained in his “Book Four of the Institutes” that church government should not deviate from precepts set out in Scripture. Ecclesiastic organization ideally brings symmetry, harmony and discipline within the membership of the church. Human decrees in church government should be fully divine in character, and the church should have a true and legitimate constitution as a well-organized form of government⁵³. Viola⁵⁴ argues that the New Testament principles of government never support a hierarchical structure or chain-of-command relationship.

The New Testament Church was founded on the principles of plurality partly influenced by both the Hellenism of Greco-Roman, Judaism of the Diaspora on one hand, and gospel of Christ which covers diversity of nations preached by the apostles on the other. Diversity upheld differences in religious beliefs, gods, cultural heritage, language and skin pigmentation, national or geographical origins of each ethnic group often held strongly with much esteem in the New Testament world⁵⁵.

Viola⁵⁶ defines hierarchical type of government as one that is built on a chain-of-command social structure. Hierarchical leadership is rooted in a worldly

51 Janssen, A.J. 2000. *Constitutional Theology: Notes on the Book of the Church Order of the Reformed Church in America*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

52 Koffeman, L.J. 2014. *Religion and State in the Netherlands – a Christian perspective*. In: Kuster and Setio 2014. Unpublished.

53 Brand, C.O. & Norman 2004. *Perspectives on Church government*. 5 Views. Nashville: B & Academic.

54 Viola, F. 2008. *Pursuing the Dream of Organic Christianity: Reimagining Church*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook.

55 De Villiers, J.L. & Pelsler, 1988. *Guide to the New Testament 2: The New Testament Milieu*. Half-way House: Orion Publishers.

56 Viola, F. 2008.

concept of power. It is present in the vicious forms of liege/lord feudalism and master/slave relationship. This explains why it is endemic to all ethnic traditional bureaucracies in Malawi and elsewhere. Yieke⁵⁷ agrees that in strong ethnic communities, hierarchical type of government is an additional variable in social development. The role of ethnicity and ethnic divisions in the church and society can be negative or positive. It can also be a problem or a potentially rewarding challenge. Unfortunately, it is the negative aspect of ethnicity that has all along been publicized or researched⁵⁸.

The following are some of the factors and reasons that promote ethnicity and ethnic divisions in Malawi:

6.1 Geographical and demographical divisions enhance ethnicity

The geography and demography of Malawi contribute to the enhancement of ethnicity since they divide the country's long narrow strip of land into 28 districts in three systematic ethnic political regions of North, South and Central⁵⁹.

The districts are governed by District and Ward Councils which are highly politicized in ethnic lines in all the regions. Malawi is located on the South-Eastern part of Africa bordering Zambia on the north-west, Mozambique on the east, south and west and Tanzania on the north-east. The name Malawi comes from the Maravi, an old name for the Nyanja Bantu people who inhabited the area around 10th century AD. Its size is over 118 000 square kilometres (45 560 square miles)⁶⁰.

According to the 2013 World Fact Book Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)⁶¹, Office of Public Affairs Washington DC, Malawi has a population of 14 million with the following ethnic groups: Chewa 32.6%, Lomwe 17.6%, Yao 13.5%, Ngoni 11.5%, Tumbuka 8.8%, Nyanja 5.8%, Sena 3.6%, Tonga 2.1%, Ngonde 1% and others 3.5%. The British colonized Malawi during 1891 and they ruled the country until 1964 when it gained independence under the dictatorship of Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, a Chewa.

57 Yieke, F. 2010. *Ethnicity and Development in Kenya: Lessons from the 2007 General Elections*. Kenya Studies Review: Volume 3, Number 3. 5-16. December 2011.

58 Yieke, F. 2010.

59 Benson, T.D. & Conroy, A. 2002. *Malawi: Atlas of Social Statistics*. National Statistical Office Zomba. Washington, D.C: Malawi and International Food Policy Research Institute.

60 Benson, T.D. *et al.*, 2002.

61 2013 World Fact book Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) on Malawi. Office of Public Affairs Washington DC.

In 1993 Malawi became a multiparty democratic state and in the following year Dr Bakili Muluzi, a Yao by tribe, was elected President. The third late President Bingu Wa Mutharika, a Lomwe, was succeeded by his Vice President, the fourth President, Mrs Joyce Ntila Banda, and a Yao, who finished Bingu's tenure for only 2 years. The incumbent Professor Peter Arthur Mutharika, a Lomwe, became the fifth President of Malawi after winning elections in May 2014. The Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) and the Government of Malawi adopted the centralized hierarchical political and administrative system developed by Colonial European Masters from the 19th Century⁶².

History records that the method of church government and system of evangelization was dividing areas of operation according to ethnic and tribal cultures, languages and practices in various situations. In 1904/1910, there was an agreement made by the CCAP Missionaries that in Central Region a boundary on the Nkhotakota side be made; the area between Bua River and Dwangwa River to make a cultural distinction in areas of operation for the CCAP Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods⁶³.

There are disagreements on the boundary today; the Nkhoma Synod says the boundary is Dwangwa River while the Livingstonia Synod says the boundary is Bua River. The distance between the two alleged rivers' boundaries is almost 35 kilometers. Within this area the Livingstonia Synod has established ethnic congregations and so too the Nkhoma Synod, and each one of them claim it is their jurisdiction. The fact is that if it is established that the boundary is the Bua River, then the Nkhoma Synod has encroached in that area⁶⁴.

On the other hand, if it is established that the boundary is the Dwangwa River, then the Livingstonia Synod too has encroached in that land. When the two Synods met in 1904, the Livingstonia Synod was at that time operating all the way down to Chilanga in Kasungu and Tamanda on the Zambia border. The agreement was that the boundary starts from the Chipata Mountain in Mchinji reaching the mouth of the Rusa River in Mchinji from which point the boundary followed the watershed between the Rusa and Bua Rivers, passing

62 Zeze, W. 2014. Christ, the Head of the Church: Authority, Leadership and Organizational Structure within the CCAP – Nkhoma Synod in Malawi. Paper presented on Protestant Church Polity in Changing Contexts 2 at International Conference, Utrecht, The Netherlands 7-10 November 2011.

63 Historical documents copied from Blantyre Synod Archives 1910, 1924, 1995, 2002.. Files with permission from the General Secretary: 25/03/2015.

64 Historical documents seen from Blantyre Synod Archives: 25/03/2015.

through Kapirintiwa across the Rusa River on to Kungwinyemba. It did not reach the Lake Malawi area. The Nkhoma Synod then did not establish congregations in the disputed area for a long time while the Livingstonia Synod did establish congregations in the Nkhotakota area since it was its Tumbuka/Tonga area of operation⁶⁵.

6.2 Historical influences enhance ethnicity

Again the historical influences of the Synods of the CCAP in Malawi played a significant role enhancing ethnicity in the church. The first two Scottish Church Missions from Scotland to arrive in Malawi namely the Blantyre and Livingstonia played a part in indirectly promoting ethnicity. The system of church government and method of evangelization were highly mono-ethnic, centralized and autocratic in orientation. McCracken⁶⁶ holds:

It is one of the ironies of Livingstonia Mission that a Presbyterian Free Church Mission should have organized on highly centralized autocratic lines. The Free Church of Scotland was a decentralized body with semi-autonomous parishes controlled by a minister supported and to some degree supervised, by a committee of lay elders.

In contrast, the Blantyre and Livingstonia Synods harbored strong tendencies toward hierarchicalism and clericalism, providing ministers with exclusive authority similar to that of the bishop in Episcopal circles. The matter of parity among minister, elder and deacon did not receive any attention or consideration. The situation was the same between indigenous leaders and the ordained missionaries and among the office-bearers in general. Thompson⁶⁷ quotes the remarks made by Rev W. A. Elmslie in Livingstonia Synod who sharply said about his African colleague:

He is an assistant to me, working under my supervision. He has no congregation of his own. He lives on the station with me and takes his work according to my guiding.

The Livingstonia Synod Missionaries coming from the Liberal Free Church failed to practice the Reformed church polity and order of the sending “mother body” at home. Furthermore, Thompson⁶⁸ quotes Donald Fraser who again sharply emphasized:

Our native pastors are not equal with European ministers.

65 Historical documents seen from Blantyre Synod Archives: 25/03/2015.

66 McCracken, J.C. 1977.

67 Thompson, T.J. 1975.

68 Thompson, T.J. 1975.

In the process they felt out of convenience to carry out the ministry of divide and rule even among the ethnic Tonga, Tumbuka and Nkhonde in the Northern Region in 1875.

On the seat of authority in the church, the Livingstonia Synod held the concept that Christ rules the church through office-bearers. The authority of the church is centred in the offices that constitute the highest assembly. Therefore, the Synod is the highest court of the church, with the Presbytery as the basic governmental unit and the church council as the lowest court. In the Church of Scotland, the Presbytery was confirmed as the basic unit in the government of the church. Ministers were considered as first, among all, to become members of the Presbytery and Synod by their separation in ordination. Thus through Christ's sacraments, His Word and Spirit using office-bearers with representation in assembly as found in the Scottish Presbyterian ecclesiology as was maintained⁶⁹.

However, the Blantyre Synod Missionaries, who came from the established conservative Church of Scotland, felt the need to remain in the Southern Region of Malawi and minister among the Yao and Lomwe in 1876. Informed by their Reformed church polity tradition, the Missionaries at Blantyre Synod took an early bold step to train African office-bearers. Ross⁷⁰ describes the first stage in the training:

The training of Africans took more shape in 1893 with an announcement that a deacon class of seven but a representative of many more will in like manner devote themselves to service, meets every morning at 7.00 o'clock. All these successfully completed their training and were ordained as deacons on 4th November 1894.

In 1893, the ordained deacons were given responsibility together with Rev David Clement Scot to exercise church discipline, work and life of the mission and were sent to establish churches in villages around Blantyre. However, the Malawian office of the "deacon" was not properly familiar to the traditional Presbyterian Churches in general. It was the innovative creation of Rev David C Scot who wanted to use the knowledge and wisdom of the Africans, especially in the area of native evangelization, care for the vulnerable and church discipline⁷¹.

69 Selfridge, J. 1976.

70 Ross, A. 1996.

71 Ross, A. 1996.

In the spirit of historic reformed church tradition which advocated for the priesthood of all believers and distribution, specific offices of minister, elder, and deacon according to gifting, David Scot felt the need to take the challenge and put his ministry on risk. However, many European Missionaries opposed the ordination of natives because it implied a kind of “equality” which was wrong. They conceived that it was wrong to teach that an African was as “good” as the white man because he was not. If he were good, he would be on a “level” with the white man, but it was because he was inferior that he was under the white man⁷².

Another thorny and challenging phenomenon with regard to “hierarchy” and “ecclesiastical power” in Blantyre Synod was the establishment of the “Mission Council” of the Blantyre Mission as the “first governing assembly”⁷³. It was followed by the founding of a Kirk Session around 1900 at the St Michaels and All Angels Church, the Blantyre Presbytery in 1904 and the Blantyre Synod in 1956. The “powerful ecclesiastical” “Mission Council” was responsible to the “Home Committee” in Scotland. Ross⁷⁴ observes that although in some areas indigenous structures were set up, the “Mission Council” was always the real source of both ecclesiastical power and authority in the hierarchy of Blantyre Synod. It controlled the larger resources including land, all buildings, schools, hospital, churches and funds. The local session and Presbytery had little or no control over major elements in the staff and property of the churches in their area. The “Mission Council”, in effect a white oligarchy, controlled all the major financial resources in the field, paying African ministers, teachers and evangelists (for most full-time staff), and controlling their posting and work. Neither the Kirk Sessions formed in 1900 nor the Blantyre Presbytery founded in 1904 had any authority over these vital matters. Matters pertaining to vision, mission and directions in which the church should expand appeared on the agenda of the “Mission Council”. Between 1904 and 1924, the Blantyre Presbytery was officially the highest ecclesiastical court for Europeans and Africans in all church matters, but in reality the “Mission Council” was responsible for everything in Blantyre Synod⁷⁵.

In 1924 the General Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) became the highest ecclesiastical court, although by this time the Church had not yet received its autonomy from the Church of Scotland. In

72 Sundkler, D. & Steed, D. 2000.

73 Sundkler, D. & Steed, D. 2000.

74 Ross, A. 1996.

75 Sundkler, D. & Steed, D. 2000.

1956, the Presbytery of Blantyre together with the Presbyteries of Livingstonia and Nkhoma attained the status of Synods with the General Synod as the Supreme Court of Appeal. In 1958, the Blantyre Synod received autonomy from the Church of Scotland⁷⁶.

Alexander Hetherwick was the architect of hierarchical tendencies engrafted into the Blantyre Synod because he recommended that the system of church government for the Church resemble the civil government where the chief and headman ruled over his council of elders. The system, according to Hetherwick, represented the true rule of the church, like that of the bishop in his synod of presbyters, of the minister in his Kirk session, and moderator in the Church of Scotland. Since then Synods of Livingstonia and Blantyre were characterized by high hierarchicalism similar to the Episcopal System of church government. Therefore, historically speaking, the Presbyterian Church system which the Blantyre Synod and the Livingstonia Synod inherited from the Scots from the beginning of their Missionary enterprise was highly professional, hierarchical and clerical which compromised the traditional reformed church polity⁷⁷.

6.3 Cultural and linguistic influences enhance ethnicity

Since its inception, the Livingstonia Synod operated from Chitipa up North of Malawi all the way to Chilanga some 6 kilometers South of Kasungu District. However, in 1923 the Livingstonia Synod handed over Chilanga and Tamanda Stations to the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (Nkhoma Synod) under an agreement reached between the two Missions. The boundary agreed upon was the Chisemphere area along Milenje River based on the language and cultural orientation of the Chewa people⁷⁸.

On the Kasungu side the boundary was the Mpasadzi River. Allegedly the current situation is that the handover of Kasungu and Tamanda was done without proper consultations with the local congregations and traditional chiefs who were very influential in that area. This raised an amount of bitterness not entirely forgotten to this day (over 93 years now)⁷⁹. Riddle Henderson, for years a missionary at Tamanda, complained in 1923:

We have two fully organized congregations with over 1 000 members and twice as many catechumens. These are unanimously against the change. It is to be

76 Zeze, W. 2014.

77 Zeze, W. 2014.

78 Historical documents seen from Blantyre Synod Archives: 25/03/2015.

79 McCracken, J.C. 1977.

regretted that in connection with the proposed transfer, no reference whatever has been made to the congregations and nothing has been done to explain to them the necessity for the transfer or to lessen their opposition to it⁸⁰.

Again the Nkhoma Synod started getting involved in the Dwangwa area in the Livingstonia Synod's jurisdiction contrary to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by Rev Mac Alpine and Rev Murray in 1904. Evangelism and church planting operations extended in pursuit of their ethnic Chewa "children"⁸¹.

Following the establishment of the Dwangwa Sugar Estates, the Livingstonia Synod felt the need to establish Tonga/Tumbuka prayer houses of its own in the Dwangwa area from the year 1974. The Nkhoma Synod also felt the need in pursuit of the Chewa-speaking workers on the Sugar Estates Factory who originally came from areas under Nkhoma Synod in Central Region of Malawi. The members had difficulties to adjust to services of worship conducted in Chitonga, the local language. The Livingstonia Synod Minister, Rev Chande Mhone, was under pressure to start Chichewa church worship services for members who originally came from the Chewa-Nkhoma Synod. Soon the members began to meet informally for separate Chichewa services of worship, resulting in the establishment of the Majiga Prayer House by the Nkhoma Synod without consulting their sister, the Livingstonia Synod in 1979⁸².

The Majiga Prayer House broke away from the Kayereka or Dwangwa Prayer House of the Livingstonia Synod on linguistic and cultural reasons, thereby enforcing ethnicity within the Church. Areas where problems erupted with regard to ethnicity and encroachment in the Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods were the Nkhota-kota-Dwangwa area, the Kasungu – Nkhamenya area and Lilongwe – Kanengo and other areas in the Central Region⁸³.

In 1923, a border agreement was drawn on the Kasungu side by both the Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods. On the Kasungu side, the area of ethnic dispute was between the Dwangwa River and the Milenje River, again a distance of approximately 40 kilometers. The Livingstonia Synod today says the boundary was the Dwangwa River while the Nkhoma Synod says the boundary was the Milenje River. Here again both the Nkhoma and

80 Weller, J. *et al.* 1984.

81 Ngwata, S.M. 2015/06/20. Exclusive Personal Interview carried on the conflict areas at his home Nkhamenya: Kasungu.

82 Ngwata, S.M. 2015/06/20.

83 Ngwata, S.M. 2015/06/20.

Livingstonia Synods have several congregations and prayer houses within this area between the Milenje and Dwangwa Rivers⁸⁴.

Since 1999 the Nkhoma Synod had aggressively rolled out to open congregations and prayer houses at the Livingstonia Synod's jurisdiction in the Dwangwa area such as Chigunda, Chinkhuti, Matiki, Nyavuwu, Ukasi and even north of the Dwangwa River at Kangoza, Chidebwe and many places. The Nkhoma Synod had planted over 80 congregations since the ethnic conflict started over half a century ago⁸⁵.

In retaliation the Livingstonia Synod also built parallel Livingstonia/Nkhoma congregations and prayer houses at places like Matiki, Ukasi and Nyavuwu whose services of worship were conducted in Tonga and Tumbuka to cater for their children⁸⁶.

6.4 Scramble for resources and other interests enhance ethnicity

One of the motivating factors for scrambling for space and ethnic members of the competing Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods was resources, claiming as such: "our ethnic land, buildings, money" and "our people" in town⁸⁷.

Mhone⁸⁸ argues that the opening of the Mpasadzi Tobacco Farming Scheme around 1974/75 and the development of Chatoloma and Nkhamenya as subsidiary rural growth centers led to the competition for congregations and space between the two Synods, especially in the area of the Milenje and Mpasadzi rivers. The Nkhoma Synod established the Thupa Congregation in 1978 in an area that had been part of the Kavizinde Congregation of the Livingstonia Synod. Similarly, the Livingstonia Synod established the Kasanya Congregation in 1990 in an area that had been part of the Kakonje Congregation of the Nkhoma Synod. Up to 1970, the main Northern-most congregations in the Nkhoma Synod were Kakonje in Chief Chulu's area and Dwangwa in Chief Simulemba's area, established as early as 1925. Similarly, the Southern-most congregations of the Livingstonia Synod were Kavizinde in the Mpasadzi area and Kapululu in Simulemba's area, both of which were established in the 1940s. By 1967, the Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods' boundary ethnic conflict had intensified as to which one of the two

84 Ngwata, S.M. 2015/06/20.

85 Jere, P.Q. 2/ 03/2015. The Sunday Times, the Holy Platform and C.C.A.P. Synods Co-existence to promote Regionalism. Online:www.Sundaytimesmalawi.net

86 Jere, P.Q. 2/ 03/2015.

87 Jere, P.Q. 2/ 03/2015.

88 Mhone, S.P. 2015/03/ 20.

Synods would be in charge of the Chatoloma-Chamakala area. Both the Livingstonia and Nkhoma were then rushing in to plant congregations and prayer houses for their Chewa/Tumbuka-Tonga members in the main village centres such as those of Mafumpizi, Chamakala and Kadweya.

Msangaambe⁸⁹ holds that the church uncritically derived its polity from that of the traditional Nyau cult and drew its leadership from the ethnic Chewa and Ngoni Chiefs/Village Headmen (Nkosini) and other leaders of society. The Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods certainly inherited ethnic leadership ideologies and autocratic leadership styles from both traditional leaders and white missionaries, to an extent which contributed positively or negatively to the current compromised church polity.

6.5 Church politics and impunity enhance ethnicity

Zeze⁹⁰ holds that Malawi's political system at village, town, district and national level is another factor that had direct influence on church polity practice and church government discourse in the CCAP. Historically, one officer was in authority; he hovered above the office-bearers who were considered his assistants. It could be observed that a similar traditional system of autocracy existed during pre-missionary and pre-colonial relations: senior kings had a number of subordinates or tributaries who owed allegiance to them locally.

Therefore, political power and authority were vested in one person, thereby enhancing ethnic allegiance to a group of ruling class. The church took a similar traditional system of church polity and order of governing the church. Church politics and impunity on the part of the leadership of the Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods developed as they broke the rules of unity, procedures and regulations of the General Assembly at will.

6.6 Weak General Assembly Constitution and Institutions

Mhone⁹¹ holds that by the tendency of the Synods of Livingstonia and Nkhoma to disregard the constitution, rules, procedures and practices of the CCAP, the General Assembly enhances ethnicity. Since 1982 the General Assembly had tried to no avail to address the problem of the Majiga Prayer House by negotiating its transfer to the Tonga/Tumbuka Livingstonia Synod. However, the initiative had been blocked by the members of the Chewa Prayer House in 1995 without being asked to account for their action. The

89 Msangaambe, C. 2011.

90 Zeze, W. 2014.

91 Mhone, S.P. 2015/03/ 20.

Majiga Prayer House continued to grow as a branch of the Chewa dominant Nkhoma Synod and was later upgraded into a full congregation in 1999 by the Nkhoma Synod. From that time on various resolutions of the General Synod had been passed which the Nkhoma Synod never implemented. In reaction to the failure of Nkhoma Synod to implement all the agreements and resolutions, the Livingstonia Synod resolved to abolish all borders with the Nkhoma Synod, implying that each Synod was then free to establish congregations anywhere⁹².

Since 2003, the Livingstonia Synod has aggressively opened up congregations in Nkhotakota, Kasungu, Lilongwe and in all places where Tongas and Tumbukas live, building churches side by side with the Nkhoma Synod in the Central Region⁹³.

There were several resolutions between 1958 and 1995 and almost all of them were not adhered to because they did not receive 100% approval from all the Synods. For example, if a resolution had been passed that the boundary was Dwangwa on the Kasungu side, it would be changed if the boundary would have required the approval of all the Synods, including the Nkhoma Synod. The Nkhoma Synod would send back that resolution and veto it saying the boundary had not changed; it still remained Milenje or Mpasadzi. That resolution would then be null and void as a result of this veto. The Synods had created this veto power inadvertently and in the end it choked all the operations of the General Synod. It seems the Synods were more powerful than the General Assembly. The General Assembly was desperately powerless to enforce its decisions and policies on the offending Synods in the case of the Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods⁹⁴. This is one of the reasons why the ethnic boundary conflict between the Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods could not be resolved in over 93 years.

It is just like the big five of the United Nations Security Council with veto powers on serious global issues. In them lies the real Super power of the world. However, the new constitution of 2002 removed the “*Barrier Act*”, to ensure that decisions of the General Assembly were binding, once passed by the General Assembly without the requirement of approval from the Synods except in one or two types of amendments or resolutions⁹⁵. As the General

92 Jere, P.Q. 2/ 03/2015.

93 Mhone, S.P. 2015/03/ 20.

94 Constitution of the General Assembly 1956, 2002, 2007. *The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) and some General Synod files 1985-2007, with Permission from the General Secretary Blantyre Synod: Blantyre.*

95 Constitution of the General Assembly 1956, 2002, 2007.

Assembly was struggling to enforce her laws and regulations, there were alleged cases of graft and corruption at the Headquarter Offices in Lilongwe. The Offices were closed for some years to correct the mess and only re-opened two years ago.

7. Constructive approaches to ethnicity and ethnic divisions

The following are some constructive approaches to ethnicity and ethnic divisions in the contemporary church in Malawi.

7.1 Governance by Christ's body principle

Unity in the church of Jesus Christ must be indispensable. Since the church is the body of Christ, it implies that the church in its essence is one and that it can never be more than one. Because Christ is one, there is but one body of Christ. And because the church is the body of Christ, there is, and there can be, but one church⁹⁶. The unity of the church must parallel with the unity in diversity of God's Godhead. Unity is essential for the very existence of the church. To ignore and abolish unity is to abolish the church itself, just as to have other gods is not to believe in the one true God, and to expect another Christ is to reject the one true God. The unity of the body of Christ is threatened not by diversity, but by divisions. What must not exist within the body is division or schism. If the body of Christ in its essence is one, it would seem to be an obvious inference that division is impossible. The body of Christ is an indissoluble unity in diversity⁹⁷.

7.2 Governance by Christ's mutual love

The church must be built up on three Reformed essential elements: the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the administration of the sacraments and the exercise of discipline, these are not merely marks of the church, but according to divine law of love and justice of grace, they are also as the basis for classification and content of a church order. Thus within the fellowship of the community, there is mutual subjection governed by mutual love. From the outset the Reformed tradition understands that the believer's life to exist must be reflected in law of love. The whole of life is religion, is divine service. The church is not simply an institution; she is a "mode

96 Koffeman, L. 2014.

97 Janssen, A.J. 2000.

of existence”, a way of being in communion with Christ, the community of Christ⁹⁸.

With the mandate of Christ the Head of the church by the power of the Holy Spirit the church must reach out to make disciples across ethnicities, cultures, languages and nations. The contemporary African churches are in serious dilemma as they struggle to understand their European imposed archaic church polities and orders in their own challenging context. They must therefore continue reforming and equipping members about the fundamental principles of the gospel so that their devotion to Christ will be evident in lifestyle, values and the entire worldview.

7.3 Governance by Christ’s authority

Haitjema⁹⁹ maintains that according to the Reformed view, legitimate church polity which must be rooted in Holy Scriptures and the confession must be formulated to meet the needs of this borderless diverse and multi ethnic church. According to Borgdorff¹⁰⁰, church polity concerning the organization of the local church must realize the rule of Christ as the Head of the Church according to Scriptures. Jesus Christ must exercise his absolute authority in all affairs of the church. All authority in the church belongs to Christ. From His place of authority at God’s right hand, Christ gives the keys of His kingdom: he validates in heaven what is done in His name. At stake for Reformed tradition are: *Sola Sacra Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Fide*, *Sola Deo Gloria* (only the Word of God, only mercy, only faith, only the honour of God)¹⁰¹.

The most fundamental secret of the Reformation is situated in that everything should be in the field of vision of God, that God reigns supremely in all spheres, that there is no tiny area of which Christ cannot say that it is His. Thus within the fellowship of the community, there is mutual subjection governed by mutual tolerance and harmonious interaction in the love of God¹⁰².

98 Janssen, A.J. 2000.

99 Haitjema, T.L. In: Du Plooy, A. le R. 1982. *Reformed Church Polity: Essays and Topics*. North West University: Potchefstroom: TPT.

100 Borgdorff, P. 2008. *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government*. 2000 Revision. Grand Rapids: Faith Alive.

101 Van der Walt, T. 1983. *Our Reformational Tradition: A Rich Heritage and Lasting Vocation*. Silverton: Promedia Publications.

102 Janssen, A.J. 2000.

7.4 Governance by Triune Godhead's harmony

In Reformed tradition, therefore, there is no control or authoritarian authority, because the church as an organism is called to live by divine life of the Trinity, the same life that exists harmoniously within the Triune Godhead family¹⁰³. God is one in three Persons of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, co-exist in divine harmonious community. The harmonious inter-cultural relationship could be a sign of divine commitment to the God of diversity. Walden¹⁰⁴ holds that for churches to make progress in race and cultural relations, in many cases, they must learn to reformulate church polity which accepts people of different ethnicities, praise and worship God together. Seeking greater diversity in the church is not only morally correct, but is increasingly becoming a matter of survival for many congregations.

7.5 Governance by Christ's Great Commission

However, circumstances differ in most parts of our world. If the church has a sense of mission like that of its Master, then it must find ways to reach people wherever they are. Berkhof¹⁰⁵ argues that as a result of what Christ has accomplished, it must be about the essence of the Head of the Church, about the glorified Lord who, in the cross and resurrection, has overcome the authorities and who is now seated at the right hand of God who is participating in the divine rule of the world. Jesus Christ is universal. He, the Messiah of Israel and the Lord of the whole world.

Hence, no authority and power can establish boundaries that separate people in an essential way. Of course, boundaries exist: national political frontiers, language barriers, cultural and historical differences and racial colouring. But, God's Kingdom encompasses all, and this is accomplished in Christ's victory over all powers. Therefore, the divisions that destroy the church, people of God, are already deprived of their force¹⁰⁶.

The barriers which people set up against each other, in order to maintain their own position, and to put down others, are broken down through divine fellowship and mission. The oneness, holiness and catholicity nature of the church, therefore, are divine gifts. The church is compelled by the Holy Spirit to mission, to cross boundaries.

103 Janssen, A.J. 2000.

104 Walden, K.J. 2015. *Practical Theology for Church Diversity: An Experienced Guide for Clergy and Churches*. Eugene: Cascade Books.

105 Berkhof, L. 1969. *Systematic Theology*. London: Banner of Truth.

106 Janssen, A.J. 2000.

Berkouwer¹⁰⁷ holds that the church is charged with proclamation of the message of God's reconciliation, so that the boundaries are rendered powerless. The church may not function as a fearful border guard, but as one who brings good tidings. These boundaries include seas and frontiers, cultures, languages and people groups; they may not be far distant. The church transgresses boundaries to welcome all to the festal joy of the Messianic feast. The boundaries may be class and economic groups, racial groups and age groups, the handicapped and physically challenged sexual orientation and other interest groups. Moltmann¹⁰⁸ argues that the Pentecost event fulfilled the Old Testament promise that salvation was to be proclaimed freely and fully to everyone. The birth of the church opened a new chapter in God's redemptive work for all nations of the world regardless ethnic affiliations.

According to Walden¹⁰⁹, the doctrine of diversity is expounded upon in 1 Corinthians 12 in relation to gifts of the Spirit. Contemporary technology for good collaboration, social network communication, church leadership diplomacy and other activities are necessary for the promotion of church diversity. Challenges will arise, but by relying on God and working with one another in strategic ways, solutions are possible. Religion at its best brings people in harmonious ways, facilitates healing and conveys meaning¹¹⁰.

Sanou¹¹¹ holds that the church will not become a model of unity and a sign of hope for the world if ethnicity and tribalism within its structures are not bravely addressed and discarded. What is more evident in Christian life is one's personal experience with the love of Christ and the ability to share that divine love with others, even with one's enemies. The local church comprised of people from various ethnic identities has the opportunity to demonstrate how Christ removed the dividing walls of animosity. Ethnic diversity reflects an eschatological picture when people of God coming from various people groups will gather together before the throne of God.

107 Berkouwer, G.K. 1976. *The Church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

108 Moltmann, J. 1977. *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*. New York: Harper Row.

109 Walden, K.J. 2015.

110 Walden, K.J. 2015.

111 Sanou, B. 2015. *Ethnicity, Tribalism and Racism: A Global Challenge for the Christian Church and its Mission*. The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership: Volume 9.1 www.journalofchristianleadership.org. 16/02/2016.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has established that the implementation of hierarchical structures in the church is causing discomfort and divisions in the CCAP. It is at odds with the New Testament Christianity. However, Reeves¹¹² argues that despite the existence of ethnicity and ethnic divisions between Jews and Gentiles in the New Testament Church, the Apostles did not let “ethnicity impede their missionary work”. They in fact affirmed it and the church were blessed as a result. Ethnicity in the New Testament was not denied. It was not obscured. It was simply accepted as a fact and responded to creatively and positively for the building up of the church.

This article also indicated that unity and diversity in the church of Jesus Christ must be indispensable. Since the church is the body of Christ, it implies that the church in its essence is one and that it can never be more than one. Schism, no matter how deplorable and harmful it is, in itself cannot break down the unity that is in the body of Christ. From the outset, the Reformed tradition understands that the believer’s life to exist must be reflected in covenantal relationship with God and humanity. Diversity exists and ought to exist within the body of Christ. Church diversity in the form of multicultural tolerance is a sign of people’s spiritual maturity toward God.

The battle for the church today therefore is against sin, deadness, decadence and irrelevance¹¹³. Every generation has to battle anew. A church which does not continuously reform and renew in light of its challenges ceases to be the true church of Christ¹¹⁴. The contemporary church must be relevant and contextual to meet the needs of its worshipers. However, to be a Christian, in Christ, one is called to belong and live out the richness of one’s ethnic origin, culture, education, career, and yet to experience at the same time an even deeper unity with those of other ethnic identities, races and cultures in obedience to Scripture. Walden¹¹⁵ holds that for churches to make progress in race and cultural relations, they must learn to reformulate church polity which accepts people of different ethnicities, praise and worship God together. Therefore, the CCAP must recover its lost historical Reformed heritage, restructure church polity which will transform ethnicity in the church and turn it into an opportunity for growth and healthy diversity.

112 Reeves, J. 1988. *What is wrong about being ethnic?* Orthodox Research Institute:info@orthodoxresearch.org. 19/09/2014 Reprinted September 1988 Dawn Diocese of the OCA: World Magazine Publication.

113 Walden, K.J. 2015.

114 Van der Walt, T. 1983.

115 Walden, K.J. 2015.