

**Ethnicity in the church and church structures:  
An assessment of the CCAP Livingstonia and  
Nkhoma Synods in Malawi**

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## **Abstract**

The study seeks to understand how the New Testament Church functioned since it was constituted by Jews and Gentiles on the basis of common belief in Christ in the multi-cultural situation. This study reflects on the case as to why the contemporary Church of the Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Church in Malawi is presently still suffering division on the basis of ethnicity, while it was not a problem in the New Testament Church. The study works with two realities: firstly the CCAP Church in Malawi is divided by ethnicity and secondly the New Testament Church was a pluralistic community. The problem faced in the New Testament Church was how to manage cultural tension: on the one hand between Jewish believers and those of the diaspora; and on the other hand ethnic hostilities between the Jewish and Gentile believers regarding the imposition of the Jewish traditional laws and other customs on the Gentile believers. In the contemporary church, Christian believers are in dilemma as they struggle to understand archaic church polity in their own socio-political context. In the Reformed church polity perspective, Christ is the Head of the church and He governs the church. The objective of the church order is to serve the establishment of God's order in the church through the ministry of the Word, sacraments and discipline by means of the Holy Spirit in which the kingdom of God is unlocked for His church.

**Key words**

Ethnicity, ethnic divisions, church structure, influences, reformed church polity, Presbyterian, church government, ethnic diversity.

## **Dedication**

The dedication of this dissertation goes to my dear mother Mrs Emily Matumula Zgambo and late elder sister Anne Zgambo. As a young boy in the 1970s, I learnt a lot about the beauty of their hard lives and endurance to realize desired dreamsto the glory of the Lord.

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## **Abbreviations**

CCAP Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian

DRCM Dutch Reformed Mission

UMCA Universities Mission to Central Africa

LMS London Missionary Society

UPC United Presbyterian Church

MCP Malawi Congress Party

UDF United Democratic Front

AFORD Alliance for Democracy

ANC African National Congress

NGK Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk

NHK Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk

GKSA Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid- Afrika

MOU Memorandum of Understanding

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This research study is an assessment to find out reasons why ethnicity and ethnic divisions exist as recurrent problems in the Church of the Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Synods of Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma in Malawi. The Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) is structured mainly on the political, socio-cultural and religious circumstances and linguistic matters (Sundkler & Steed 2000:467- 480, 795ff). The aim of this study is to investigate whether ethnicity and ethnic divisions in the CCAP and church structures could be illuminated to give insights into their history, causes, nature, and impact and eventually how the church could manage this question of ethnicity.

#### **1.2 Definition of terms**

The word “ethnicity” (technical, noun) is defined as the fact of belonging to a particular race or tribe: many important factors may be related for example tribe, race, class, gender, age (Hornby 2010:500). Jenkins (1997:9-13) 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. Ethnicity means someone’s traits of ancestry, classification, cultural background, language, beliefs, rituals, dressing, and “ethnic group” is a group of people who separate themselves to behave differently from other ethnic groups according to situations (Hornby 2010:500). In the New Testament Church, ethnic divisions were related to two *ethnoi* groups in the apostolic community. An “ethnic boundary” of tension based on circumcision and dietary customs existed between the Hellenistic believers and the Jewish believers on the one hand and

between Palestinian Jews who spoke Aramaic and Jews from the diaspora on the other, also referred to as “Grecians” (Acts 2, 6, 14, 15).

The word “structure” means the arrangement of and relation between the parts of something complex, the quality of being well-organized, or to give structure to something (Pearsall 2002:1423). The term “church structure” probably designates the arrangement of the parts of the particular church drawn by the authority of the church for its interests and operations (Pearsall 2002:1423). The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English (Hornby 2010:436), defines “diversity” (noun) as a range of many people or things that are very different from each other. However, ethnic diversity probably means the ways in which people differ in ethnic groups, and organizations possibly including age, race, native language, gender, religion, personality, cognitive style, physical health, mental health, tenure, organization function, and many others (Tracey et al 2004:193). Therefore, in this study, ethnic diversity relates to the quality of being diverse, unlike, varied, or ethnically and culturally different from dominant, either or majority groups in the church or society (Tracey, et al 2004:193).

### **1.3 Research problem**

#### **1.3.1 The historical context of the problem of ethnicity in the CCAP**

##### **1.3.1.1 The socio-technical product of Colonialism**

Contemporary scholars have not written much on the legacy of tension on the part of the White missionaries and their impact on ethnicity and ethnic divisions in the CCAP Synods of Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma in Malawi. Some scholars who mention

ethnicity and how it is happening on ground-level in the CCAP in their works are Rev Mapala, Selfridge, Pauw and a few others.

Mapala (2016:1f) holds that ethnicity is systematically embedded both in the history of the CCAP Synods as well as that of Malawi as a nation. Ethnic intolerance in Malawi is a social product of the colonial and post-colonial eras and of the Protestant Missionaries, more especially the apartheid-minded Afrikaner Missionaries, who exported their home social-political differences to mission fields; this even though the indigenous Christians wanted a church that was free from denominational and ethnical differences. Ethno-national differences determined the politics of inclusion and exclusion between the English and Afrikaner Missionaries (Mapala 2016:209). The Anglo-Boer War had far-reaching effects on the people living beyond the borders of South Africa. It did not only affect the relationship of the British and Afrikaner politicians but also permeated into ecclesiastical spheres and raised tension between indigenes that used to live side by side. The British–Afrikaner tension was very evident in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Mission stations (Mapala 2016:146).

Selfridge (1976:27-37) alleges that the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) Missionaries practised ethnic segregation as they made in-roads in the area of Chief Mwase. It appeared that the Presbyterian identity did not appeal much to the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) Missionaries, as they were more interested in advancing the Dutch identity along with its political undertones. Among White Missionaries, the Dutch identity was not based on ecclesiastical tradition, but rather on a nationalistic ideology that arose as result of the Anglo-Boer War against the English (Mapala 2016: 97).

The Colonial administrators employed a divide and rule strategy to serve their interests. In the 1890's the British Colonial administrators encouraged competition between ethnic groups and favoured certain ethnic groups that were friendly to them. The underlying factor for the choice of chiefs to be included in the indirect rule scheme was the ability to govern a large political area (Mapala 2016:133). The colonial legacy for indirect rule, using the strategy of divide-and-rule in the 1880s became a dominant practice in Africa between the 1930s and 1950s (Mapala 2016:19f). The ethnic conflicts in the Anglophile African states are largely a direct product of the British colonial legacy of the indirect rule through a strategy of divide-and-rule (Blanton & Athow in Mapala 2016:16-20).

However, ethnicity in relation to colonial legacy for indirect rule defined the tribe (ethnic grouping) as a unit. The definition is based on the notion that every African belongs to a tribe and that every tribe is under a traditional leader or chief. Therefore, through indirect rule reform of the 1950s, traditional leaders grouped together with the bourgeoisie, to form district councils which were ethnically defined. This process led to the visibility of ethnic identity (Mapala 2016:16-20). Individuals began to mobilise themselves and exclude those who did not belong. This could be the reason why ethnicity is political. It was socially constructed for an intended group- purpose. In the 1890s, amidst resistance from the British Government and South African British Company to colonise the country, the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) was not only one of the influential churches in the country, but it was also the main political player in the creation of Malawi as a nation-state (Ross 1996: 85,103).

However, during the pre-Colonial period, different ethnic groups related to one another in Malawi, with particular attention to acculturation, integration and intermarriage, and

these sociological processes shape people's ethnic identities (Mapala 2016:15). In some African societies, ethnicity was not universally practised across the continent, because in certain instances, a tribal chief was ruling an ethnically heterogeneous society. For example, most Malawian chiefs had been ruling ethnically heterogeneous societies for over a century (Mamdani in Mapala 2016:20f).

Kayambazinthu and Moyo (2002:92) write that the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Synods partly contributed to regionalism and tribalism because the demarcations of their borders were identical to the political regional boundaries in Malawi. The European Church Missionaries divided the CCAP Synods according to restricted areas of operation in the North for Livingstonia, South for Blantyre and Central for Nkhoma respectively. However, by settling for a federalism, which was based on inter-regional suspicion/mistrust, the CCAP actively contributed to the ethnic division of the country (Munyenembe 2016:5f). Therefore, the negative legacy of colonialism, traditional culture and dictatorship played a major role in fostering ethnic divisions in Malawi (Kaspin 1995:595-620).

### **1.3.1.2 The boundary disputes between the Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods**

The problem of boundary disputes between the Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods has roots which can be traced back to the handover of Kasungu Station of the Livingstonia Mission to the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (DRCM) and the mission work at Tamanda. The exercise was done without proper consultation with the local congregations and traditional chiefs who were very influential in that area. The handover

raised an amount of bitterness between the Livingstonia and Nkhoma Mission stations- not entirely forgotten to this day: over 90 years now (McCracken 1977:274-296).

Pauw (1980:271) insists that the transfer of Kasungu Station of the Livingstonia Mission to the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (DRCM) was not only to persuade them to join the CCAP, but was also crucial for understanding the ethnic tension as root cause of the border dispute between the Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi. Riddle Henderson, for years a missionary at Tamanda complained in 1923:

We have two fully organized congregations with over 1000 members and twice as many catechumens. These are unanimously against the change. It is to be 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 it (Weller, J. & Linden, J. 1984:123-124).

Nevertheless, the Rev. Thomas Cullen Young, Scottish Missionary at Chilanga Congregation had to vacate the area to make way for the Nkhoma-Chewa speaking Mission. Rev. Young and others strongly attempted to persuade the Livingstonia's Foreign Mission Board in Scotland to give up Chilanga Mission Station in favour of the Chewa of Kasungu (Selfridge 1976:37ff). It was also the use of the Tumbuka and Tonga ethnic languages in worship services in the Livingstonia Synod's congregations in the North of Kasungu and Nkhotakota in the late 1960's that contributed to the ethnic border dispute. For example, during negotiations for the transfer of Livingstonia Synod Chilanga Congregation, school and medical facilities in Kasungu to Nkhoma Synod in 1919, the reasons cited for the transfer were mainly that Chewa speaking people were ethnically and culturally distinct under the influence of the Nyau secret cult (McCracken 1977:47-64). In 1923, after a lengthy debate, a formal agreement was reached and

Livingstonia Mission and its mother-board in Scotland offered to transfer all its stations, schools and medical facilities in the Kasungu-Mchinji Zone to the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) at Nkhoma (McCracken 1977:47-64).

In 1973, following the establishment of the Dwangwa Sugar Estates in the Livingstonia Synod's area of jurisdiction, the Livingstonia Synod felt the need to establish ethnic Tonga/Tumbuka prayer houses of its own in the Dwangwa area from 1974 onwards (Mhone 2014/03/20). The Nkhoma Synod, for whatever reason, also felt the need to start Chichewa Prayer houses following the ethnic Chewa-speaking workers on the Sugar Estates Factory, who had originally come from areas under the Nkhoma Synod in the Central Region. The members had difficulty in adjusting to services of worship conducted in Chitonga, the local language. The Livingstonia Synod Minister in charge of the Marawe Congregation, Rev. Chande Mhone was under pressure from members, who originally came from the Chewa-Nkhoma Synod to introduce Chichewa language services of worship. Soon members began to meet informally for separate Chichewa services of worship- a move that resulted in the establishment of the Majiga Prayer House by the Nkhoma Synod without consulting their sister synod the Livingstonia Synod, in 1979. The Majiga Prayer House was a breakaway from Kayereka or the Dwangwa Prayer House of the Livingstonia Synod (Mhone 2014/03/20).

In 1982, the General Assembly of the CCAP began to get concerned about the possible emergence of ethnic tension between the Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods in the Dwangwa area. The General Assembly tried to address the problem of the Majiga Prayer House by negotiating its transfer to the Tonga/Tumbuka Livingstonia Synod. However, the members of the Chewa Prayer House blocked the move in 1995. The

Majiga Prayer House continued to grow as a branch of the Chewa ethnic group under the Nkhoma Synod, and later it was upgraded into a full congregation in 1999 (Mhone 2014/03/20). Since 1999, ethnicity was the motivating factor for church-planting methods and cultural, linguistic and economic circumstances of the areas which influenced the system of evangelization of the church.

The Nkhoma Synod had aggressively rolled out to open 88 congregations and prayer houses at various places in the Livingstonia territory in the Dwangwa area such as Chigunda, Chinkhuti, Matiki, Nyavuwu, and Ukasi to the north of the Dwangwa River, Kangoza, Chidebwe and other places (Jere 2016/07/14). In retaliation, the Livingstonia Synod also built over 78 parallel congregations alongside the Nkhoma Synod congregations in the Nkhoma Synod territory at Matiki, Ukasi and the Nyavuwu Prayer houses, as well as in Nkhota-Kota, Kasungu, Lilongwe, Dowa, Mchinji, Dedza, whose services of worship were conducted in Tonga and Tumbuka which were opened to cater for their “children” (Mhone 2014/03/20). Therefore, the border dispute between the Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods was not only territorial, but existed along ethnic and political lines (Mapala (2016:1ff).

The General Assembly of the CCAP together with overseas partners (the Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church PCUSA) tried their best to resolve the ethnic wrangle and reconcile the two bitter Synods, but with no fruitful results (Minutes of General Assembly 2007:21). Chilenje (2007:116), the CCAP Church Minister in the Synod of Zambia; in his Doctoral thesis refers to the ethnic border dispute as a threat for the CCAP’s unity: the never-ending in-fighting, disagreements and encroachments into each other’s territory, disputes over agreements on unity and demarcation of

boundaries between the CCAP synods' compromise on traditional values of the Reformed doctrine, church polity, ecumenical unity and Christian lifestyle.

### **1.3.2 Influences from government systems on the CCAP**

#### **1.3.2.1 The autocratic system of government**

The autocratic system of government started early in Malawi in the 1960s when the first President Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda (1964-1994) sensed that the young nationalists such as Orton Chirwa, Masauko Chipembere, Dunduza Chisiza, Augustine Bwanausi, Willie Chokani, Rose Chibambo and others, were threatening his authority (Mapala 2016:259-260, Gama 2016/09/23). The President began playing an autocratic ethnic card as a strategy for divide and rule. Contributing to a new amendment of the Penal Code in Parliament, Dr Kamuzu Banda argued:

Nevertheless, I want to make absolutely sure that much as it is within my power, no one can get away safely in this country and if that is dictatorship, then I am a dictator. I do not mind it at all!  
(Malawi Hansard 7/10/1965:185).

To accomplish this, he put in place draconian laws and rules to suppress any critic whom he perceived as a stumbling block to his political career, particularly the nationalists who associated with the two Scottish -oriented Missions of Livingstonia and Blantyre (Mapala 2016:260). In July 1962, Banda appointed a sub-committee, with Orton Chirwa as its chairperson, to work on an MCP disciplinary code. The sub-committee was to look at party management, the disciplinary rules of which were meant, "to find ways of dealing with dissidents." The Life President, as the Supreme leader and Symbol of the Supremacy of the Party, was to be respected, honoured and revered by every member of the Party, high or low, and Party members, high or low, were expected

to conduct themselves in a courteous and respectful manner in his presence (Mapala 2016:260). President Dr Kamuzu Banda therefore, developed an autocratic system of government that was accepted in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Synods as a norm and practice (Gama 2016/09/23). The clergy were exclusively the principal-political leaders who behaved like autocratic rulers within the community (Ross 1996: 85,103, cf. Mapala 2016:276, 301).

### **1.3.2.2 The ethnic system of government**

The influences from the ethnic system of government did not spare the church in its structures such as those of the local congregation, presbytery, synod and general assembly. To advance the relationship between the church and state, church leaders and members were forced to promote the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) and State Government in pursuit of development and peaceful co-existence in society in Malawi (Gama 2016/09/23). The President Dr Kamuzu Banda claimed that the Chewa ethnic group made up half of the national population to impress on other ethnic groups that they were more insignificant than the Chewa of the Central Region (Mapala 2016:20, 254-255). The President Dr Kamuzu Banda's exclusionary policies were largely influenced by the transfer of the Kasungu Station which in his view and that of his fellow Chewa people was intended to deprive them of the right to Western formal education so that they could not compete meaningfully in the job market (Mapala 2016:20, 254-255).

According to Kaspin (1995:595-620), during President Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda's 31 years of dictatorial authority: Dr Banda (a Chewa himself); and the Chewa ethnic group promoted ties of ethnic solidarity and regionalism to acquire political dominance. In the first years of Independence, two languages were used as written languages and in use in the media and civil service: Chinyanja and Chitumbuka, the first being the official

language of the Centre and South and the second being that of the North. In 1968, the President decided that there would be only one African language in official use in Malawi- viz Chinyanja renamed Chichewa. Other ethnic languages such as Chiyangonde, Nyachusa, Tonga, Yao, Lomwe, Sena, including Chitumbuka would not be allowed in government offices, schools, the press and radio. By the equating of Chewa to Maravi, President Dr Banda's ideological construct for political mobilisation was to promote his ethnic group. Both colonial and postcolonial population censuses had never categorised the Chewa together with the Nyanja as one ethnic group (Mapala 2016:272).

Later, it was clarified as a way of fostering communication and national unity: the extent of which entailed a new mythology of Malawi's cultural identity which soon became apparent. Chewa identity was Malawi's identity and President Dr Banda was the embodiment of both. In the 1970's, the President Dr Banda authorized the establishment of the Department of Linguistics and Chichewa at Chancellor College, University of Malawi. President Dr Banda celebrated with joy the Chewa language and culture while seriously vilifying the Tumbuka Northerners and ignoring the Yao/Lomwe Southerners (Kaspin 1995:595-620).

### **1.3.2.3 The hierarchical system of government**

The church polity in the CCAP was hierarchical, strongly influenced by the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) and President Dr Kamuzu Banda. Ross (1996:66) is right when he asserts that during President Dr Kamuzu Banda's autocratic rule from 1964 to 1994, ministers of religion exercised authority and ecclesiastical power like the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) political leaders. With his own authority under threat, President Dr Kamuzu Banda opted to play the tribal card and to attempt to maintain his highly

authoritarian rule by means of hegemony of his own Chewa-speaking people of the Central Region (Ross 1996: 85,103). Therefore, the symbiotic relationship that the Nkhoma Synod had with Banda and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) could have contributed to the fragmentation of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) along ethnic lines (cf. Mapala 2016:276, 301, Gama 2016/09/23).

The ultimate objective of the Nkhoma Synod leadership was to claim the Central Region as its sphere of influence, because it was their missiological approach, coupled with economic and political reasons (cf. Gama 2016/09/23). To achieve this, it employed ethnicity, because politically it was well-positioned, because of its close association with the Banda regime (Mapala 2016:276, 301). The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) in its structures and operations, copied in one way or the other, the hierarchical dominance in structures of the government of the day.

#### **1.3.2.4 The political system of government**

Abale Phiri (2011:110), a CCAP Lecturer at Zomba Theological College, in his Th. D. thesis: "Inter-culturalisation as transforming praxis: the case of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Blantyre Synod urban ministry," claims that the Eastern and Southern Regions are predominantly populated with the Yao and Nyanja ethnic groups, although the Lhomwes are part of the largest ethnic group in the Southern Region. The voting pattern in 1994 was ethnical-political manipulation in the negative sense: a reaction, rather than a proactive attempt defined by a relationship of contrast to the hegemonic group which was significant and self-defining (Kaspin 1995:595-620). The 1994 General Election betokened tribalism and ethnicity whereby the Southern region voted 49 % for UDF's Bakili Muluzi, a Yao; the Central region voted 39 % for MCP's Kamuzu Banda, a Chewa and the Northern region voted 14% for AFORD party's

Chakufwa Chihana, a Tumbuka (Government Gazettee 1994). The government led by the United Democratic Front and Dr Muluzi was accused of practising nepotism, ethnicity and endemic corruption in all sectors of the economy from 1994 to 2004.

The vices of nepotism, ethnicity and massive corruption in government and other sectors have been continued by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) governments led by the late Professor Bingu Wa Muntharika and the incumbent Professor Peter Muntharika to this day. Ross (1996:265) holds that church leadership too often mirrors the corruption, graft and fraud, prevalent in wider society, rather than offering a challenge to it. The clergy seek authority within the church structures in order to gain power, fame and resources, principally money (Pass 2007:127).

#### **1.3.2.5 The separate training for church-ministers**

The problem of ethnicity and ethnic divisions also found expression in the separate training of church-ministers. When Zomba Theological College was opened in 1977, theological mistrust did not dominate the debates in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), but it was one of the divisive legacies that the Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) missionaries exported to Malawi (Mapala 2016:205-206). In 1993, the CCAP Nkhoma Synod resolved that after completing a three-year programme at Zomba Theological College, its students were asked to undergo a separate one-year programme at Nkhoma headquarters to perfect their education and ensure that they conformed to NGK tradition (Mapala 2016:205-206ff). Consequently, the separate training for church-ministers from the Synods of Livingstonia and Nkhoma at Zomba Theological College enhanced ethnic divisions and compromised the long-sought-after ecumenical unity in the CCAP in Malawi. Candidates from other ethnic tribes apart from the Tumbuka of Northern and Chewa of Central regions respectively, would not be

allowed in those synods. The candidates would be dropped for the obvious ethnic-political reasons.

Mapala (2016:125) is right when he argues that ethnic intolerance in Malawi is a social product of the colonial and post-colonial eras. Consequently, the Synods of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma were structured and, based on nepotism, ethnicity and endemic-political corruption, due to geographical, traditional, and economic, historical as well as Christian-ecclesial conditions of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Zeze 2014:177). Therefore, the colonial and post-colonial political system influenced church polity discourse and practice in the CCAP in Malawi negatively.

However, ethnicity *per se* exists to bring a sense of belonging and identity to the group of individuals who belong to that particular ethnic group. The problem comes when a group wants to define itself in opposition to others. It is through the process of self-defining that some individuals have a tendency of mobilising themselves and excluding others. It is within this framework, too that ethnicity is politicised and becomes problematic (Mapala 2016:45). It is alleged that the politicisation of ethnicity by the Missionaries appears to have been influenced not only by the way they related to the other missionaries, but also by the way in which missionaries of a particular mission related to the Colonial authorities. The Missionaries-colonialists' relationship is a critical one in understanding the politics of ethnicity in Malawi and the rest of Africa (Mapala 2016:45f).

However, this study indicates from the church polity discourse that ethnicity and ethnic divisions were exposed in the church in Africa, particularly in Malawi, as a result of the

system of church government and the method of evangelization employed by some European Missionaries (Tarimo 2000:5). The phenomenon in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) escalated from an “ethnic boundary” to an “ethnic conflict” between the Tumbuka and Chewa tribes, with political and economic interests thrown into the mix (Ngwata 2014/06/20). According to Paas (2007:8), governing structures in most Malawian churches including that of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) became an imitation of the ruling structures of society and state.

Msangaambe (2011:63f) 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. Every African belongs to a tribe, and every tribe is under a traditional leader or chief. Bates (1973:23) argues that ethnicity exists when members of tribal groups compete as groups for place in class, status, and the power system of the “new nation”. It is a form of social indecision regarding the strategy of equitable distribution of opportunities available to people in the new “African nations.”

The ethnic conceptions and leadership style from both traditional chiefs and White missionaries contributed negatively to the church polity discourse and practice. Mgawi (in Munyenyembe 2016:15) holds that the indigenous leaders inherited a church not fully united. The expatriate missionaries had not dealt with the issue of total union of the synods fully before handing them over to the local leaders. The local leaders were, therefore, not able to initiate further unification, especially in view of the fact that the mother churches had committed themselves to keeping on with assisting their former missions with money, personnel and other resources. According to Pohor (2006:316),

many denominations and local churches were organized along ethnic/tribal lines in Africa. One of the main historical reasons is that Western Missionaries tended to work in specific regions and to focus on particular ethnic language groups. Msiska (2011:111f) contends that churches in Africa have church orders that were imposed upon them by Europeans and there is uncertainty as to which direction church polity should take. In many African diverse-ethnic situations, they are struggling to understand church orders and practices in their context.

Ethnicity, on the one hand, when abused can be the root of many serious internal problems connected with human rights and social justice (Cordell & Wolff 2010:4-5). Tarimo (2000:7f) argues that the question of ethnicity and ethnic divisions cannot be addressed by state government machinery. The attitudes, behaviours and practices of manipulation are to be transformed and eliminated by relevant biblical approaches. Zgambo (2011:39), the researcher and CCAP Church Minister in the Synod of Blantyre, in his MTh Dissertation refers theologically to the existence of ethnicity in the CCAP Synods because of “human sin” in need of Christ’s salvation and deliverance. The impact of ethnicity and ethnic divisions, if not checked, could bring about disastrous consequences such as hatred, injustice and insecurity, distress, abductions, disappearances and killings, rape, suffering, poverty and death. On the other hand, when appropriated properly, ethnicity and ethnic divisions could be positive ingredients that guarantee the realization of the idea of civil society by enhancing participation, integration of loyalties and commitment to the public good of the church and society (Tarimo 2000:7ff).

## **1.4 Research questions**

The central question is: to what extent and how the divisions in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) on the basis of ethnicity be assessed from a Reformed Church polity perspective? To come to the assessment of the structure of the CCAP, the following research questions will be used in the evaluation:

1.4.1 What are the reasons for structural divisions based on ethnicity in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP)?

1.4.2 How was ethnicity managed in the New Testament church?

1.4.3 Which principles of church government applied in the organisation in the New Testament church?

1.4.4 How could ethnic diversity be accommodated in the contemporary church from the Reformed Church polity perspective?

## **1.5 Hypothesis**

The hypothesis of this study is that structural divisions of the church according to ethnical lines are based on a modernistic view of the church and government, which should be rectified by sound application of church polity principles according to Scripture.

## **1.6 The purpose of the research**

The purpose of the study is to assess the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods and to evaluate to what extent and how the

structural divisions in the (CCAP) based on ethnicity can be analysed from a Reformed Church polity perspective.

## **1.7 Research methods**

From the Reformed Church polity perspective, it is accepted that the Scripture is the Word of God and that Jesus Christ governs His church. This study is located in the interpretive approach that uses qualitative methods to examine social reality. The interpretive paradigm uses qualitative methods that seek to unload or unpack thick descriptions of phenomena (Marre 2007:33f). Qualitative methods provide in-depth knowledge of phenomena that creates a holistic picture of the learning interactions of those who have lived the experiences (Strauss 2008:47ff).

The study mainly comprises of a purely qualitative and descriptive literature study, which includes (as is applicable to different chapters), a focus on exegetical, historical and contemporary resources. Chapter 1 will discuss the introduction to the study. Chapter 2 will investigate reasons for the existence of ethnicity and ethnic divisions in the CCAP Church and church structures in the context of Malawi. Chapter 3 will investigate exegetical, historical and contemporary literature on ethnicity in the New Testament church. The study will also discuss approaches illustrated by Jesus Christ and the apostles to manage ethnicity in the New Testament church. Chapter 4 will reflect on relevant data on the principles of church government applied in the organisation of the New Testament church. Chapter 5 will discuss how ethnic diversity could be accommodated in the contemporary church. Chapter 6 will make an evaluation, summary and give a conclusion.

## **1.8 Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations in the study are paramount because they prescribe what is permissible or not in conducting research (Kalof, Dan & Dietz 2008:102). The researcher will observe the Code of ethics as stipulated by the Faculty of Theology and the North-West University. The researcher will observe participants' rights of privacy, protection from harm, confidentiality and anonymity, protection from human rights violation and withdraw from any stage of the research. Using the informed- consent forms, respondents will give their consent for free, in their participation in the research (Mason 2002:18).

## **1.9 The significance of this study**

This study will contribute some important knowledge to the limited discourse on church polity from the Reformed Church polity perspective in the CCAP Church in Malawi. Church polity must promote the servitude of the church in the kingdom (Du Plooy 1997:179f). A number of scriptural principles for church polity in Reformed church polity perspectives will be reflected to motivate and stir up debate on the legitimate ecclesiastical polity and order in the contemporary church. The findings as demanded by most research participants, particularly church leaders, will help the church to take a fresh look at the question of ethnicity and ethnic divisions in the church and to begin re-examining the church polity of the church. This will enrich future debates within the church and beyond, and help to avoid repetition of previous mistakes. Therefore, the study will benefit the church because the results of this research will give members some theological answers as to how to resolve prevailing challenges today.

## 1.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, the aim of this study is to investigate whether ethnicity and ethnic divisions in the CCAP and church structures could be illuminated to give insights into their history, causes, nature, and impact, and eventually, on how the church could manage this question of ethnicity. There is a great expectation that this study will stimulate change in the church polity conversation in the contemporary CCAP Church in Malawi.

The purpose of church polity is to study in Scripture how Christ can penetrate into the hearts of His children through the administration of the keys of the Kingdom so that the church truly becomes the body of Christ (Du Plooy 1997:179). Church polity as “the sacral science of the government of the visible church” must engage deep-rooted matters and motivations of the human heart, such as idolatry, lust and cravings.

The central idea of the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century was *semper reformanda*, always reforming, a continuous process of change and transformation (Van der Walt 1983:6-7). This relates *metanoia* or change of heart, mind, behaviour, and approach: how to respond theologically to recurrent problems of ethnicity in the church and church structures. The contemporary church must apply biblical principles in its own complex situation in order to maintain the well-being of the church and reshape the work of the church so that it may serve the Kingdom of God (Vorster 2011:1-2). Therefore, the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) in Malawi faces two challenges namely: first, the transformation of the heart through reformed church polity, which in turn will transform the phenomena. Second, the challenge to formulate a professional approach from the Reformed Church polity perspective for the restoration of order and sanity in the church, thereby managing the causes of divisions based on ethnicity.

## **1.11 Research outline**

### **1.11.1 Chapter 1: Introduction to the study.**

This introduction aims at investigating whether ethnicity and ethnic divisions in the CCAP and church structures could be illuminated to give insights into their history, causes, nature, and impact and eventually, how the church could manage the question of ethnicity.

### **1.11.2 Chapter 2: Ethnicity and church structure divisions in the CCAP Synods.**

This chapter will discuss factors for structural divisions based on ethnicity and ethnic divisions in the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) in Malawi. The study aims at indicating that the ethnically-hierarchical leadership style from the European Scottish and South African Missionaries and Colonial Masters influenced, to a certain extent, negatively upon the church polity discourse, government and practice in Malawi.

### **1.11.3 Chapter 3: Ethnicity in the New Testament church.**

This chapter will reflect on the question of how ethnicity was managed in the New Testament church. This study aims at exploring ethnicity which existed as a recurrent problem based on the traditional culture between the Jewish believers who spoke Aramaic and the Hellenistic believers from the diaspora who spoke Greek and how the early church managed the phenomenon.

#### **1.11.4 Chapter 4: The church governance in the light of the New Testament.**

This study aims at investigating from scriptural principles of church government applied in the organisation in the New Testament church in the Reformed Church polity perspective. The scriptural principles of the New Testament church are pillars on which the legitimate *Presbyterial* system of church government rests, as the basis for assessing the ethnically-hierarchical-based structure in the church.

#### **1.11.5 Chapter 5: Ethnic diversity in the contemporary church.**

This chapter will focus on how ethnic diversity could be accommodated in the contemporary church from the Reformed Church polity perspective. The study aims at constructing an approach that could be applied to overcome ethnicity and accommodate ethnic diversity in the contemporary CCAP based on the experience of the GKSA in South Africa; how ethnic-based structures developed in the church decades prior to and after 2009, and how the GKSA managed ethnic separation and restructure itself to accommodate ethnic diversity. To some extent, there is an important similarity between the GKSA in South Africa and the CCAP in Malawi.

#### **1.11.6 Chapter 6: Conclusion.**

This chapter aims at discussing an evaluation of the study, giving a summary and a conclusion.

## Chapter 2

### Ethnicity and church structure divisions in the CCAP in Malawi

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the recurrent problem of ethnicity and church structure divisions in the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) in Malawi. The main question dealt with in this chapter is as follows: what are the reasons for structural divisions based on ethnicity in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP)? The chapter accepts that the ethnically-structural divisions in the CCAP in Malawi are based on the socio-political and cultural influences, as well as linguistic matters (Sundkler & Steed 2000:467- 480, 795ff). However, to assist in the study, the following structure analysis will be used:

- Influences from Scotland and England.
- Influences from South Africa.
- Unity and the establishment of the CCAP General Synod.

The aim of the chapter is to indicate that the ethnically-hierarchical leadership style from the White Missionaries, Colonial Masters and traditional chiefs impacted to a certain extent, negatively upon the church government and practice in Malawi (Pohor 2006:316). Collegialism which found its point of orientation not in Scripture, but in state government influenced church polity discourse in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Smit 2018:3-4). In this period, the collegialistic form of government mostly found expression in a form of oligarchy executed by permanently elected functionaries of the church (Synod). In this construction of the church, the synod becomes known as the church, or as it is sometimes expressed, the synod as the sum total of the different congregations (Smit

2018:3-4). In many churches, Europeans autocratically imposed church orders on them and there is uncertainty as to which direction church polity would take. In contemporary ethnic situations, there have been attempts to understand and provide solutions to such traditional archaic church orders and practices in their context presently (Msiska 2011:111f).

## **2.2 Influences from Scotland and England**

### **2.2.1 Rev. Dr James Stewart**

Rev. Dr James Stewart was the person who initiated missionary work that developed into the establishment of the Livingstonia and Blantyre Synods. He originally came from Scotland and settled at Lovedale Mission in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. According to Sundkler & Steed (2000:467-480, 795ff), the life, work and death of David Livingstone in 1873 inspired at least three Missionaries 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 from England. After attending the funeral of Livingstone in Westminster Abbey, Rev. Dr Stewart felt strongly that launching a mission in Central Africa in memory of Livingstone was imperative and on April 18, 1874, the indelible impression fired up his enthusiasm. 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. Moreover, it 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 Livingstonia (Selfridge 1976:19-20).

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 over fifty years in Africa (Selfridge 1976:20). By May 1875, a pioneering party under Edward D. Young, a 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 seaman) (McCracken 1977:47-64). 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 them. In South Africa, Rev. Dr Stewart recruited four Xhosa Africans namely Shadrach Mnqunana, William Koy, Isaac Wauchope and Mapassa Ntintili to serve as teachers and evangelists (Shepperd 1971:20).

## **2.2.2 The Livingstonia Synod**

### **2.2.2.1 Rev. Dr Robert Laws**

Rev. Dr Robert Laws established the Livingstonia Mission in 1875. After some difficult travelling up the Zambezi River and over land, they reached the Shire River in Malawi, the country of their destination, and on 12 October 1875, they sailed onto Lake Malawi itself. Young called for the Old Hundredth (Psalm) to be sung in praise to the Lord their God. 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 name (McCracken 2000:66).

### **2.2.2.2 Mission to Tongaland**

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 had been abandoned, but was later replaced by evangelization and schools in the Tonga villages. The Tonga schools enrolled more than 1 000 students in 1880s. They moved again to Kondowe in 1884, and Rev. Dr Robert Laws named the new mission site “Livingstonia.”

In 1906, the number of pupils had increased overwhelmingly from 107 to over 3 000 pupils (Pachai 1973:21). According to Velsen (in Sundkler & Steed 2000:472), Tongaland along the shores of Lake Malawi in Nkhata Bay 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, though.

The hold of the traditional Tonga religion was very strong and the first converts did not appear until 1889. The chief who governed in Tonga land was Chief Mankhambira. He was opposed to the establishment of churches in his area but when the Ngoni who had come from Mzimba invaded the land, Chief Mankhambira asked for military help from the missionaries, “an effective medicine” to defeat the Ngoni and to acquire new economic outlets: in return he would allow Christian churches in the Atonga land. The Atonga then welcomed the mission’s employment on a “wages 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's personal influence on the Ngoni Chief Mbelwa of Mzimba (Sundkler & Steed 2000:472f).

### **2.2.2.3 Mission to the Ngoniland**

Rev. Dr Laws made a first visit to the Ngoni in September 1876. He first spoke to a village headman, but he never conceded to grant him an audience to meet Chief Mbelwa. 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 Ngoni background, speaking the language of the Ngoni Chief. William Koy moved warily, and did not even begin emphasizing the impending arrival of the white missionaries, but suggested that the king might need a school for the children. A fortnight later Koy returned to Chief Mbelwa, accompanied by Rev. Alexander Riddle who showed him the Bible and explained: "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 monopoly (Sundkler & Steed 2000:473-74f).

By 1890, there were only 53 communicants in the whole mission, including the Cape Maclear outpost and Ngoniland. The outstanding pioneer missionaries in northern Malawi were Rev. Dr Laws; head of "Livingstonia" and one of the great strategists of the centre who led the Mission for fifty years, his fellow Scottish partner 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-sufficiency (Thompson 1975:7f).

#### **2.2.2.4 The opening of the Overton Institute**

The result of the exceptional educational response from Tonga, Tumbuka and Ngoni, the Overton Institution was opened in the Livingstonia Mission in 1894. This school ensured “the continued pre-eminence of northern Nyasaland in the field of education.” Overton 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 Africa.

McCracken (1977:75ff) 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 Mphonongo 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).

According to the World Atlas of Christian Missions (1911:95), Southern Tanzania also received its share, with six teachers going to Moravian Rungwe and another six to the

Berlin Lutherans at Ilembula. The “seeds” sown at the Overtoun Institution were blown all over East and Central Africa. In 1910, the Livingstonia Mission, with 12 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” (Sundkler& Steed 2000:471).

#### **2.2.2.5 The hierarchical system of church government**

The system of church government and method of evangelization were highly mono-ethnic, centralized and autocratic in orientation. The church polity for the Livingstonia Synod was characterized by tendencies of “hierarchy” and “clericalism”. Ecclesiastical power in the church was expressed in the establishment of the all-white “Mission Council” influenced by the mother church in Scotland, the “first governing assembly”. The powerful ecclesiastical “Mission Council” was responsible to the Home Committee in Scotland. McCracken (1977:224) holds:

It is one of the ironies of Livingstonia Mission that a Presbyterian Free Church Mission should be 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.

However, the Livingstonia Synod harboured strong tendencies toward hierarchy and clericalism, providing ministers with exclusive authority similar to the administration of the archbishop or bishop in prelacy church government. The matter of parity among minister, elder and deacon did not receive any consideration. Thompson (1975:178) quotes the remarks made by Rev. W. A. Elmslie in Livingstonia Synod who noted sharply 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 practise the Reformed church polity and order of the sending “mother body” at home. Furthermore, Thompson (1975:178) and McCracken (1977:290) quote Donald Fraser who again sharply emphasized:

Our native pastors are not equal to European ministers.

In the process, they felt out of their comfort zone 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 of the Headship of Christ who rules the church through office-bearers. The authority of the church is centred in the Synod offices which 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 church government. Ministers were considered as first, among equals in the church. They became members of the Presbytery and Synod by their ordination and induction, through administration of Christ’s sacraments, His Word and illumination of Spirit as maintained in the Scottish Presbyterian ecclesiology. In 1956, the Presbytery of Livingstonia attained the status of Synod (Zeze 2014:175ff). The Livingstonia Synod has 170 congregations, 1000 prayer houses with 200, 000 members in its 24 presbyteries, numerous primary and secondary schools, mission hospitals, Livingstonia University and the Voice of Livingstonia Radio.

## **2.2.3 The Blantyre Synod**

### **2.2.3.1 Henry Henderson**

Henry Henderson established the Blantyre Mission in 1876. The Church of Scotland group consisting of a medical doctor and five artisans 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. The station would become the Centre for Christian mission, commerce, education and agriculture in the Southern Region of Malawi. Soon the mission site was identified and named “Blantyre” after the birthplace of Dr David Livingstone on 23 October 1876 (Selfridge 1976:32).

The Scottish Missionary beginnings at Blantyre were difficult, dramatic and controversial. In this ethnic Yao-dominated area, for refugee slaves would turn up, seeking shelter at the missionary’s house. Small communities were established, a motley group of refugees and individuals from various backgrounds, including educated Kololo. The mission estates employed all the people 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 authority mainly, taking over the role of Magistrate and Civil Governor. In 1878, in one instance the “Blantyre Atrocities”, the severe disciplinary action, led to death sentence (Selfridge 1976:33f). 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” led to an estrangement between white and black.

### **2.2.3.2 Rev. David Scott**

At this difficult time, the Blantyre Mission was fortunate that it had 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 motto, combining “Christianity, Civilization and Commerce,” (popularly known as three CCC’s), a formula which Scott translated as the “Gospel and Modern Culture” which also meant deep respect for African culture (Mapala 2016:64). Rev. Scott and his successor, Alexander Hetherwick, 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- (that was) his ecclesiastical program.

The church building at Blantyre Mission, the St Michaels and All Angels, was built under the leadership of Rev. Scott and it stands to this day as 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 did not believe in colour divisions and he had a gift of encouraging his African co-workers (Sundkler & Steed 2000:798-799).

In 1893, three of his African colleagues Joseph Bismark, Rondau Kaferanjira and Donald Malota became deacons. The other notable ones who were ordained were Harry Matecheta, John Gray Kufa and Harry Mtuwa. Rev. Scott gave them all tasks to do in which they had responsibility and virtual autonomy, apart from infrequent supervisory visits from missionaries. In the same year 1893, the ordained deacons were given responsibility together with Rev. Scott to exercise church discipline, in the work

and life of the mission and were sent to establish churches in villages around Blantyre (Sundkler & Steed 2000:798-799). However, the Malawian office of the “deacon” was not properly familiar with the traditional Presbyterian Churches in general. Rev. Scott innovated the use of knowledge and wisdom of the Africans; especially in the area of native evangelization, care for the vulnerable and church discipline (Ross 1996:112).

In the historic reformed tradition, which advocated the priesthood of all believers and distribution of specific offices of minister, elder, and deacon according to gifting, Rev. Scott felt the need to take the challenge and put his ministry at risk. 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 since he was inferior he was under the white man. However, Rev. Scott found little support for his “radical views” among European settlers. Rev. 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 (Sundkler & Steed 2000:798-799).

However, many other British missionaries of the day shared Rev. Scott's views on African race and culture – that they were progressive. He opposed certain elements of traditional culture as incompatible with Christianity (e.g. initiation rituals and 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, Rev. Scott went to Kenya where he founded the Kikuyu Mission- now the Presbyterian Church in East Africa. Rev. David Clement 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 Overton Institute of the Livingstonia Mission (Mapala 82-83). 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 the English language, mathematics, higher learning and African culture (Sundkler & Steed 2000:799).

### **2.2.3.3 Alexander Hetherwick**

Alexander Hetherwick was instrumental as the architect of hierarchical tendencies engrafted into the Blantyre Synod. He recommended that the system of church government for the church resemble that of civil government where the chief and headman ruled over his council of elders. That 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 (Sundkler & Steed 2000:799). Since then, hierarchy had characterized the Synods of Livingstonia and Blantyre similar to the Episcopal System of church government. Therefore, historically speaking, the Presbyterian Church system that 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 polity.

### **2.2.3.4 Rev. Harry Kambiri Matecheta**

In the local congregations, the pastors, elders and evangelists went about doing their tasks. A leading personality who then became 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 (Sundkler & Steed

2000:798f). In 1933, Rev. Kambiri Matecheta was elected Moderator of his church. His wife ably assisted him. 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 duty (Sundkler & Steed 2000:799).

#### **2.2.2.5 The hierarchical system of church government**

The tendencies of “hierarchy” characterized church polity in the Blantyre Synod. Ecclesiastical-political power in the Blantyre Synod was the establishment of the all-white “Mission Council” of the Blantyre Mission as the “first governing assembly”. The Kirk Session was founded at “the St Michaels and All Angels Church” around 1900, followed by the Blantyre Presbytery in 1904 and the Blantyre Synod in 1956. The powerful “Mission Council” was responsible to the “Home Committee” in Scotland. Ross (1996:172,177) 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 the 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 of 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 (in 1900) nor the Blantyre Presbytery (in 1904), had any authority over these vital matters. Matters pertaining to vision, mission and direction 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 political

ecclesiastical court for Europeans and Africans in all church matters, but in reality, the “Mission Council” was responsible for everything in the Blantyre Synod (Selfridge 1976:32).

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 Lhomwe in 1876 (Selfridge 1976:32). Informed by their Reformed church polity tradition, the Missionaries at Blantyre Synod took an early bold step to train African office-bearers. Ross (1996:112) 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 4 November 1894.

In 1956, the Presbytery of Blantyre attained the status of Synod. In 1958, the Blantyre Synod received its autonomy from the Church of Scotland and Rev. Jonathan Sangaya became the first African to be appointed General Secretary in 1962 (Zeze 2014:175ff). Gradually, Blantyre town which grew around the Mission station is a city of two and a half million inhabitants. It still proudly bears the name of Blantyre City (Selfridge 1976:31-32). The Blantyre Synod has 600 congregations and 300 prayer houses with 1.6 million members across the Southern Region of Malawi. The Blantyre Synod runs Mulanje Mission Hospital, Zomba Theological College, Chigodi Womens Centre, and Likhubula Youth Centre, Blantyre Synod Development Commission (BSDC), Blantyre Synod Radio and many other institutions of social development.

## **2.2.4 The Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA)**

### **2.2.4.1 Bishop Charles Mackenzie**

Bishop Charles Mackenzie and company established the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA), the Anglican Church in Malawi. They came from England and arrived in Malawi earlier in 1861; but soon they experienced tragic losses of the leader, Bishop Mackenzie and others, who died due to malaria at Magomero in Chiradzulu. The rest of the missionaries left the area and headed for a safer place in Zanzibar. They did however; keep their original destination in mind and in 1879, the Mission returned to work among the Yao in Mangochi in the Southern Region of Malawi. They established their headquarters at Likoma at Lake Malawi in the Northern Region (Sundkler & Steed 2000:469-70).

### **2.2.4.2 Hierarchical system of church government**

In church polity, the Anglican Church has had an influence on the theology and church polity of the CCAP Church from the joint training of elders, deacons, youth and women leaders at Ecumenical Chilema Lay Training Centre since 1967 as well as joint - training of church - ministers at Zomba Theological College when it opened in 1977. Through interaction between the Anglican priests and the CCAP Church ministers, many young CCAP Church ministers were highly influenced in the Anglican Episcopalian prelacy, viz: hierarchically- structural tendencies, behaviour and conduct; thereby compromising the Reformed Church tradition and polity in Malawi.

## **2.3 Influences from South Africa**

### **2.3.1 The Nkhoma Synod**

#### **2.3.1.1 Rev. Andrew C Murray**

Rev. Andrew C Murray from the Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) of Cape Town in South Africa first arrived in Malawi in 1885. He toured the mission fields in which his synod would work and recommended, "It was time for them to open up a new field" (Selfridge 1976:60). 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 31 July 1888 where Rev. Dr Laws warmly welcomed him. He stayed there for a period in order to gain some experience with the Livingstonia Mission while he looked for a suitable site for his own mission (Selfridge 1976:61).

#### **2.3.1.2 The DRC Mission in Chewaland**

In July 1889, Rev. T C B Vlok, the second missionary of the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (NGK), arrived in Malawi. With the help of Rev. Murray, Rev. Vlok toured the South- West of the lake and on 28 November 1889, they chose a new site in the Central Region near Chiwere's Village and called it "Mvera," (Obedience) in Dowa (Weller, J. & Linden, J. 1984:114). 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 that was considered the boundary between the Scottish Mission of Livingstonia and the Dutch Mission of Nkhoma. The work of the Dutch Reformed Mission (NGK) was under the supervision of the Livingstonia Mission until 1897, when it became independent. Consequently, the Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) 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 tribes (McCracken 1977:47-64).

Sundkler and Steed (2000:478) hold that in the three stations of Mvera, Livulezi and Malembo, the number of Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) Missionaries increased accordingly. They met baffling problems affecting the African population including the “hut-tax” and migrant labour. The Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) Missionaries later became advocates for the Africans against the colonial government policies for political and economic interests. The effects of migrant labour roused them to imaginative measures in the form of home-crafts 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 resist the English language as far as possible.

### **2.3.1.3 Nkhoma (DRC) Mission’s attitude of hegemony**

The prevalence of racism being high in the Dutch Reformed Church(NGK)’s sphere of influence was because of approved political structural separation in the South African sending church for the Malawian Missionaries (Mapala 2016:84). Mapala (2016:97) argues that the primary reason for which the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (DRCM) always sought autonomy was not necessarily the desire of financial and ecclesiastical independence but because they intended to establish a Dutch Reformed Church (NGK), an indigenous church probably because nationalistic attitude resulted from the effects of the South African English-Boer War. Rev. Kilion Mgawi (2005:16ff), the first Malawian General Secretary of the Nkhoma Synod once said:

There were several reasons why White South Africans did not teach English. The first was the war between the British and the Afrikaners. That time Nyasaland was a British Protectorate and because of this, the Afrikaners could not teach the language of their enemies. To the Afrikaners, anyone speaking English, the language of the enemies, was a traitor and someone they considered boastful.

Another factor that enforced the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (DRCM) attitude of hegemonous-political separation was the political leadership of President Dr Kamuzu Banda and Malawi Congress Party (MCP) (Ross 1996:66). With his own authority under threat, Dr Kamuzu Banda had opted to play the tribal card in an attempt to maintain his highly authoritarian rule by means of hegemony of his own Chewa-speaking people of the Central Region (Ross 1996: 85,103). Therefore, the symbiotic relationship that the Nkhoma Synod had with President Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) contributed to the fragmentation of the CCAP along ethnic lines. The ultimate objective of the Nkhoma Synod leadership was to claim the Central Region as its sphere of influence, because it was their missiological approach, coupled with economic and political reasons. To achieve this, it employed ethnicity, because politically it was well-positioned, because of its close association with the President Dr Kamuzu Banda's regime (Mapala 2016:276, 301, cf. Gama 2016/09/23).

However, the Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) Mission played a central role in promoting modern agriculture in the Central Region. Every African Christian member at Mvera and Nkhoma was required to have a garden for modern farming. The Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) 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 ended in 1909. An impressive African School Inspector, Albert Namalambe, a former

slave, eventually looked after a rapidly expanding network of schools (Sundkler & Steed 2000:478).

The new centre at Nkhoma Mission soon became a little town with a post office, hospital, nurses training college, teachers' college, theological college, printing office, carpentry workshop and commercial shop (Pauw 1980:65ff, 190ff). In 1903, a governing council, the council of congregations, was set up to be responsible for the practical functions of the Presbytery and later it became a Synod. Nkhoma Synod has 124 congregations, 1298 prayer houses with 800,000 members, Nkhoma Mission Hospital, and numerous primary and secondary schools. It trains its church-ministers at Nkhoma Institute of Continued Theological Training (NICTT).

#### **2.3.1.4 The hierarchical system of church government**

Although the church government of the Nkhoma Synod (NGK) was reformed in tradition, in which Jesus Christ alone exercised His rule and authority through His Word through the Holy Spirit, the Nkhoma Synod (NGK) was characterized by hierarchy and clericalism, with office-bearers and assemblies. The church was organized as a top-down system with clerical officers being politically-powerful on Presbytery Committees and the Synod (Ross 1996:183). One of the reasons was that the Nkhoma Synod (NGK) 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 its church polity discourse and practice negatively (Zeze 2014:175f). In addition, the Nkhoma Synod(NGK) shamelessly imitated ruling systems of society, religious bodies, and other churches such as Scottish Missions- the Livingstonia and Blantyre Synods, Nyau secret society and the Malawi State Government (Msangaambe 2011:63f).

## **2.4 Unity and the establishment of the CCAP General Synod**

### **2.4.1 Rev. David Clement Scott and Rev. Dr Robert Laws**

Rev. David Clement Scott had suggested to Rev. Dr Robert Laws that there should be one united church for British Central Africa and by early 1890s; the two Scottish Missionaries were beginning to explore the possibility of a United Presbyterian Church (UPC). In 1903, the Blantyre Presbytery again approached Livingstonia Presbytery with the same suggestion of church unity and proposed that the Creed, Constitution and Canons could be based on those of the Presbyterian Church in India (Weller, J. & Linden, J. 1984:114ff). In the following year, further discussions were held during 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 for unity were postponed since most of the Ministers were busy with Army chaplaincy.

### **2.4.2 Constitution of the General Synod**

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 Moderator. The General Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) became the highest federation of the ecclesiastical court, although by that time the church had not yet received its autonomy from the Church of Scotland (Weller, J. &

Linden, J. 1984:114ff). They agreed that each Synod would remain unique and autonomous in its organization, decision-making and missionary enterprise in line with the practices and traditions of the “mother” church. This made the position of the General Synod in the CCAP questioned bringing disputes in the following decades. The General Synod became a federation of the Presbyterian Churches in Central Africa (Munyenyembe 2016:6, 20).

By settling for a church federalism in the General Synod system, however, which is based on inter-regional distrust, the CCAP actively contributed to the ethnic division of the country (Munyenyembe 2016:6, 11). The CCAP Synods developed in such a way that they do not recognise an authoritative body above them. Because of the way the Presbyterian system operated in the CCAP, it was generally assumed that the buck stops at Synod level. It was, therefore, in essence not easy to pass on authority to a higher body which was not fully recognised as having superiority over bodies that may be understood to be lower in rank. Munyenyembe (2016:11) argues that by not recognising the superiority of the General Assembly, it implied that the General Assembly would be unable to monitor what was happening in the Synods.

However, the Nkhoma Presbytery was reluctant to join the CCAP General Synod. It only acted as an observer in the formation of the General Synod, an action that 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. Bolink (in Mapala 2016:177) argues that the Nkhoma Synod’s reluctance to join the CCAP General Synod was influenced by the South African political landscape.

The years after 1910 were years of intense struggle for the Afrikaner people- a struggle for identity in a land that they had lost through war, but which they regarded as their own and a land dominated by a foreign government, economy and culture (De Grunchy in Mapala (2016:77). At the same time that the Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) wanted to form an indigenous church composed of missions with a Dutch identity. Mapala (2016: 84) observes that during lunch at the same meeting the Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) Missionaries protested their having to eat with Africans. Pauw (1980:274) writes:

An arrangement had been made, quite unknown to the delegates that everybody, white and black, were to eat together in one hall. This upset the DRCM delegates considerably as it was something never done before at such conferences and they strongly objected to this arrangement...Some of the Scottish missionaries strongly resented the attitude of the DRC people.

Pauw's words indicate that it was not every White and Black delegate who resented the seating arrangement made for this meal, but for the Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) missionaries- they felt it contradicted their home policy on racial segregation (Muller in Mapala 2016:84).

In 1926, when the Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) Nkhoma Synod was reflecting to join the CCAP, the Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) stressed recognition of the right of indigenous languages in terms of union. Ironically, this was intended to discourage the English influence, the language of the enemy (Mapala 2016:180). Later, after further consultations with the mother body, Nkhoma Synod joined the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) General Synod in October 1926 during the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations of the Blantyre Mission (Weller J. & Linden J. 1984:114ff). Other Synods that joined the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) General Synod are Lundazi (Zambia) and Harare (Zimbabwe).

According to Rev. Dr Kilion J. Mgawi (in Munyenembe 2016:15), the first indigenous General Secretary of Nkhoma Synod, the European missionaries or mother churches of the CCAP Missions contributed to the problems that the General Synod (now General Assembly) is facing today. Mgawi claims that the indigenous leaders inherited a church that was not fully united because the expatriate leaders had not dealt with the issue of total union of the synods fully before handing them over to the local leaders. The local leaders were, therefore, not able to initiate further unification, especially in view of the fact that the mother churches had committed themselves to keeping on with helping their former missions with money, personnel and other resources (Munyenembe 2016:15f).

#### **2.4.3 The church polity for the General Synod**

The church polity for the General Synod (now General Assembly) was to promote the Reformed traditional unity and uniformity of the body of Christ in the Presbyterian Synods in Southern Africa. The General Assembly was committed to the subscription of the historic ecumenical creeds of Nicene, Apostles Creeds, and Westminster Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, Shorter and Larger Catechisms. Rev. Dr Laws maintained English as the language of instruction and communication in the CCAP along with vernacular languages for reasons of both unity and academic opportunity (Mapala 2016:204).

The Constitution of the General Assembly endeavoured to achieve church order, uniformity and harmony. In such matters as the following: training of ministers; catechetical instruction; prevention of evils which corrupt the people such as alcohol-drinking, gambling, drug abuse, heathen initiations and other such things; education;

medical work; ordering of public worship; dispensing of the sacraments; funeral rites; criteria for selecting church elders and deacons, women's guild; and recognition of church officers (Munyenembe 2016:5f). Other areas of cooperation in church polity included theological education and Bible translation. The Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods opted to use ethnic Chichewa as the lingua franca while the Livingstonia Synod chose ethnic Tumbuka/Tonga. They also agreed on a joint hymnbook (Weller, J. & Linden, J. 1984:114ff).

The 2002 Constitution of the CCAP General Assembly (Section 8:7:2:2) demands that all its decisions and resolutions be implemented by each synod without further ratification by the synod. It further warns that failure to implement such resolutions shall be a cause for disciplinary action against the failing synod. Realising that the synods may not always be willing to bind themselves to some decision and resolution of the General Assembly, the constitution provides the following condition:

The General Assembly, however, may in some cases when passing a resolution or decision, require and specify that ratification of the resolution or decision by at least a maximum of 3/5 of all synods is necessary before the concerned resolution becomes binding on all synods. The ratification or rejection by the synod must be communicated to the General Assembly within six months of the resolution. Failure to notify within this period shall be taken as ratification (2002 CCAP General Assembly Constitution Section 8:7:2:2).

However, the 2002 constitution of the CCAP General Assembly intended to make sure that church order, rules and liturgies of the Synods were harmonised. In this regard, there was a need to generate uniformity across the Synods regarding such things as the order of service and the various liturgical instruments. The constitution of the CCAP General Assembly (2002), states that: "The General Assembly shall have power to

speak in the name of the whole church on the following and other matters” (Munyenyembe 2016:5).

Therefore, the General Synod (now General Assembly) of the CCAP meets once every four years. They discuss relevant church polity issues pertaining to the promotion of sound doctrine for the entire CCAP Church, unity, development, ecumenism, church and society issues, and the overall spiritual welfare of the Presbyterian Churches in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe (2002 CCAP General Assembly Constitution). The General Synod (now General Assembly) of the CCAP is the highest federated major assembly structure in the Presbyterian Church government in Central Africa. The headquarters of the General Assembly are located in Lilongwe, the Capital City of Malawi.

## **2.5 Chapter summary**

In summary, this chapter discussed ethnicity and reasons for separate structural divisions existing as recurrent problems in the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) in Malawi. However, to assist in the study, the following structure was used:

- Influences from Scotland and England.

Influences of hierarchy and clericalism from Scotland and England played a significant role in the CCAP organization and church polity discourse. Ecclesiastical-hierarchy and political authority in the Blantyre Synod was the establishment of the all-white “Mission Council” of the Blantyre Mission as the “first governing assembly”.

- Influences from South Africa.

Influences of racial-political prejudice from South Africa played a significant role in the CCAP organization and church polity discourses.

Autonomous structures based on race and traditional culture characterized the Nkhoma Synod. The Nkhoma Synod developed a political-symbiotic relationship with President Dr Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) that contributed to the fragmentation of the CCAP along ethnic lines. The Church Order was organized differently: top-bottom system, with the Nkhoma Synod officers being politically powerful.

- Unity and the establishment of the General Synod.

The attempts for unity were realised at the establishment of the federated CCAP General Synod in September 1924. The General Synod, as the highest major assembly was committed to the Reformed Church doctrine, traditional confessions, ecumenical unity and lifestyle. The Western European and the South Africa's racially socio-technical prejudices in politics negatively impacted upon the ecumenical unity of the CCAP General Synod.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the chapter indicated that ethnicity and ethnic intolerance exist as a result of European Colonial Administrators' and Missionaries' socio-political influences, and culturally-linguistic matters in Malawi (Sundkler & Steed 2000:467-80, 795ff). The Colonial administrators employed a divide and rule strategy to serve their interests. In the 1890's the British Colonial administrators encouraged competition between ethnic groups and favoured certain ethnic groups that were friendly to them. The underlying factor for the choice of chiefs to be included in the indirect rule scheme was the ability to govern a large political area (Mapala 2016:133).

In Africa, racial and ethnic discrimination were commonly practised in all church missions although the degree of practice varied. While racial issues were profoundly common in Southern Malawi because of the high proportion of White settlers in the population, it was also practised across the country (Mapala 2016:84, 122). The European Church Missionaries divided the CCAP Synods in Malawi according to restricted areas of operation in the North for Livingstonia, the South for Blantyre and the Centre for Nkhoma respectively (Kayambazinthu and Moyo 2002:92). However, by settling for a federalism, which was based on inter-regional suspicion/mistrust, the CCAP actively contributed to the ethnic division of the country (Munyenembe 2016:5f). Therefore, the CCAP Synods partly contributed to regionalism and tribalism because the demarcations of their borders were identical to the political regional boundaries in Malawi.

The CCAP Synods and the Government of Malawi adopted various politically-centralized structures which were developed by African traditions and Colonial European Masters from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Zeze 2014:175f). The CCAP Synods of Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma adopted a collegialistic church polity in the regional-federated areas of operation according to ethnicity. Therefore, the negative legacy of colonialism, traditional culture and dictatorship played a major role in fostering ethnic divisions in Malawi (Kaspin 1995:595-620). The CCAP Synods of Livingstonia, Blantyre, Nkhoma, and Malawi as a nation remain politically-ethnic. This study indicates that structural divisions of the CCAP Synods are politically-ethnic and hierarchical-based on a modernistic view of church and government and must be challenged or rectified in Malawi.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Ethnicity in the New Testament Church**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter will discuss the question of how ethnicity was managed in the New Testament Church. The main question for this chapter will be as follows: how was ethnicity managed in the New Testament Church? The aim of the chapter is to indicate that ethnicity existed as a recurrent problem based on the traditional culture between the Jewish believers who spoke Aramaic and the Hellenistic believers from the diaspora who spoke Greek, and how the early church managed them. To assist in the study, the following structure will be used:

- Understanding God's intention for ethnic groups in the Scripture.
- Jesus Christ's approach to manage ethnicity.
- The apostles' approach to manage ethnicity.
- The gospel's attempts to break ethnic divisions in the church.

#### **3.2 Understanding Gods' purpose for ethnic groups in the Scripture**

The points of departure for this chapter are to understand the meanings of ethnicity as the fact of belonging to a particular tribe or race (Hornby 2010:500). Positively, the word "ethnic" comes from the Ancient Greek word *ethnikos*, a people, a collectivism of humans living and acting together in a distinct traditional culture (Jenkins 1997:9-13). Ethnicity will be used in this chapter in the sense of boundary-markers that separate one ethnic group of people from another. It refers to the social ideology of human division sorted according to common culture (Acosta 2009:3f).

Ethnocentrism is produced by one's culture. In that sense, ethnocentrism is natural (Druckman 1968:45f). Negatively, it is a "syndrome" characterized by a tendency to discriminate against a stranger, an alien, and the physically different. Ethnocentrism is a consequence of our human finitude: "We cannot stand utterly free from our culture and our place in history" (Acosta 2009:3f). Ethnocentrism is therefore, a virtually universal phenomenon in-group-contacts obviously including Christians (Matsumoto & Juang 2001:61f, 91).

This chapter will explore ethnicity in relation to identity of the people of God and its divine calling to carry out God's mission to the world. The goal is not necessarily to stop being who people are ethnically and culturally, but to understand what it means to be one in Christ within the diverse church (1 Cor 12, 13, Gal 3:28, Acosta 2009:3f).

### **3.2.1 Abraham was called from an ethnic group**

The Lord God called Abraham from an ethnic group. God called Abraham to begin a "nation" or "new ethnic group" that would embrace all the other different ethnic groups in God's kingdom (Gen 12:1-8, 15:1-7, 17:1-16). The LORD said to Abram:

Leave your country, your relatives, and your Father's home, and go to a land that I am going to show you, I will bless you and make your name famous, so that you will be a blessing. And through you I will bless all the nations (Gen 12:2-3).

The Lord made a covenantal sign of circumcision with Abraham and his descendants. The people of Israel lived in Egypt as a distinct community (Sule-Saa 2000:32). In many respects the people of Israel were unique in the sense that God created a people distinct from all others, nurtured it in the isolation of the wilderness, and granted it arable land through conquest in which to dwell. Israel knew itself to be both connected to yet

radically separate from other people groups (Mcbride Jr, 1988:14). The people of Israel were called to be God's agents for His mission to the rest of the people in the world. They were chosen not because they were special. The choice was entirely dependent on God's love and mercy. Deuteronomy 7 eloquently expresses Israel's election as one of sheer grace.

### **3.2.2 God's call extends to other ethnic groups**

The call of Abraham to other ethnic groups such as Gentiles was to be considered later by his descendants, the Israelites (Sule-Saa 2000:29f). The people of Israel lived in Egypt as a distinct community or "ethnic group". The Old Testament covenant affirms the importance of kinship or lines of descent, while not excluding foreigners from the people of God. God has always been very involved in the histories of all ethnic people-groups. Through His mercy God has left His imprints on ethnic groups as revealed by their cultures. The blessings of God on ethnic groups were not limited to Israel alone, although. Israel herself benefited immensely from her neighbours (Gottwald 1985:55f).

Therefore from the inception of God's election of Israel, Abraham the founder of the nation of Israel, was made aware of the responsibility of being a holy people to redeem the world and establish God's Kingdom. Abraham was to be the father of nations and not only of Israel. The prophets often impressed on their fellow Israelites that they were meant to be witnesses to the Gentile nations (Aboagye-Mensah 1999a:21).

In choosing to honour Israel over other nations, God demonstrates that He can utilise particular ethnic groups for particular purposes. An ethnic background is the raw material God works on in His transformation of His people. In calling Israel to be His people, it was God's purpose to use them to reach and serve others. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in

advance to Abraham (Sule-Saa 2000:29f). Therefore, the Gentiles do not become part of the people of God on their own. They have been part of the people of God all along on the same grounds of grace as that of God that justified Abraham by faith (Rom 4:16-24, Rom 9:8-11, Col 3:11-12).

### **3.2.3 God's purpose for ethnic identities**

God's purpose for calling Israel is that all the ethnic groups would be brought to worship Him in their diversities (Sule-Saa 2000:38). God longs for all ethnic groups to be converted. It is in this context that some foreigners could become part of the chosen people of Israel. In fact, the people of Israel who returned from Egypt were a 'mixed crowd', not ethnically homogeneous. One of the largest tribes, Manasseh, and also the tribe of Ephraim, were in origin half-Egyptian. Furthermore, Israel's experience in Egypt is taken as a reason for the showing of mercy to aliens (Sivasundaram 2008:3).

The reception of foreigners may be studied alongside the conditions of marriage to outsiders. For instance, Moses married two outsiders, the Midianite, Zipporah, who was the daughter of a priest, and a black African Cushite (Sivasundaram 2008:3-4). From God's judgement against Aaron, in Numbers, it is apparent that he approved of Moses' second marriage. The issue is shared faith in God, for differences in ethnicity are not objectionable in God's sight. Yet the danger of too much contact with neighbouring peoples of other faiths was keenly felt, particularly in the return from exile. Ezra's prayer confessing the sin of intermarriage led to communal weeping and the shaming of those who had married foreigners (Sivasundaram 2008:3-4)

The Old Testament Scripture always point to how the New Testament gospel would be open to all (Sivasundaram 2008:1ff). God always calls different people from an ethnic

background which is the raw material that God works on in His transformation of His people (Sule-Saa 2000:38f). God's call always implies that certain aspects of ethnicity would have to be moderated. Ethnicity is central in the salvation history of God and humanity (Aboagye-Mensah 1999a:21).

### **3.3 Jesus Christ's approach to manage ethnicity**

#### **3.3.1 Jesus born and raised up as a Jew**

The Scripture indicates that Jesus Christ was born into a Jewish ethnic group in about 5 BC (Hastings & Selbie 1950:444). His ethnic genealogy could be traced from Abraham to David and from David to captivity in Babylon, and from Babylon to the birth of Jesus Christ, fourteen generations respectively (Mtt 1:1-17, cf Rom 4:16-20). Jesus Christ participated in the cultural practices of the Jewish people according to the Law of Moses (Lev 12, 19, 21-23).

In Luke, Jesus was circumcised when He was eight days old (Lk 2:21). He was then taken to Jerusalem for the purification rites (Lk 2: 22ft). Jesus went through all the rituals required of Jewish people. When He was twelve years old, they went up according to custom to present Him in the temple (Lk 2:40-51). Jesus grew as a normal Jewish boy in the process of development. He was subjected to ordinary human experiences of hunger, thirst, weariness and fatigue, pain and suffering and at length He underwent a truly human death and burial (Mtt 8:24, 21:8, Jn 4:6, 11:35, 19:28, Bromiley 1992:1048). He accepted the authority of the law, conformed to temple practices, engaged in synagogue worship, and throughout His life lived as a Jew" (Ladd 1996: 246). He was so familiar with His people and their ways that when He taught He did so with authority. According to Matthew:

When Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching for he taught them as one who has authority (Mtt 7:28, 29).

Jesus Christ was perceived as one of the Jewish rabbis in John's account of Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus. Jesus was addressed as "Rabbi" or "Teacher" (John 3:2) and had disciples just as the Rabbis did. Jesus Christ was thoroughly a Jew in every aspect (Hastings & Selbie 1950:447-448). Jesus Christ "came as a Jew to the Jewish people" (Sule-Saa 2000:33). Therefore, from Scripture, it is very significant to understand that Jesus Christ was nurtured and socialised as a true Jew in His ethnic group (Hastings & Selbie 1950:447-449).

### **3.3.2 Jesus Christ managed ethnicity compassionately**

The Scripture indicates that God's intentional- use of ethnicity allowed Jesus Christ to be incarnated into humanity to fulfil His mission in the world (Sule-Saa 2000:33). In the gospels, Jesus was perceived as any average Jew who shared in the ethnocentrism of the Jews (Bromiley 1992:1039). In Matthew 5:5, Jesus gave His disciples a restricted commission for Jews only. According to him Jesus gave the explicit instruction to the disciples, "Go no where among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritan, but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mtt 10:5). However, at the same time, on many occasions in the gospels, Jesus compassionately managed ethnicity as follows:

#### **3.3.2.1 Jesus Christ encounters the Samaritan woman**

Dunn and Rogerson (2003:1468) hold that in John 4:1-22, Jesus Christ interacts with the Samaritan woman. In 2 Kings 17 Samaria was the capital of the Northern Kingdom

which fell to the Assyrians. Many Jews were deported to Assyria and foreigners were brought in to settle on the land and help keep the peace. The intermarriage between those foreigners and the remaining Jews resulted in a mixed race, impure in the opinion of the Jews who lived in the Southern Kingdom (Dunn & Rogerson 2003:1468). Thus the pure Jews hated this mixed race called Samaritans because they felt they had betrayed their people and nation. They set up an alternative centre for worship on Mount Gerazim (Jn 4:20) to parallel the Temple at Jerusalem, but it had been destroyed 150 years earlier (Dunn & Rogerson 2003:1468).

The Jews did everything possible to avoid travelling through Samaria, but Jesus had no reason to live by such ethnically-cultural restrictions. The route through Samaria was shorter, and that was the route Jesus took. Wells were almost always located outside the city along the main road. Twice each day, in the morning and evening, women came to draw water (Dunn & Rogerson 2003:1468). One woman came at noon, however, probably to avoid meeting people because of her reputation. Jesus gave this woman an extraordinary message about fresh and pure water that would quench her spiritual thirst forever (Jn 4:13-14). Jesus said:

Whosoever drinks of this water shall thirst again. But whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life (Jn 4:13-14).

The woman was a Samaritan, a member of the hated mixed race, who was known to be living in sin and was in a public place. No respectable Jewish man would talk to a woman under such circumstances (Dunn & Rogerson 2003:1469). But Jesus did. The gospel is for every person, no matter what his or her race, social position or past sin. Jesus crossed all barriers to share the gospel and we who follow Him must do no less.

### **3.3.2.2 Jesus Christ encounters the woman with haemorrhage**

In Mark 5:25-34, Jesus encounters a woman who had an incurable condition causing her to bleed constantly. This may have been a menstrual or uterinal disorder which would have made her ritually unclean (Lev 15:25-27). The condition excluded her from most social contact (Dunn & Rogerson 2003:1346). She desperately wanted Jesus to heal her, but she knew her bleeding would cause Jesus to be unclean under the Jewish law if she touched Him. Still she reached out her - hand in faith and was healed. Jesus was not angry with this woman for touching Him: He knew she had touched Him, but He stopped and asked who had done it in order to teach her something about faith. Although she was healed when she touched Him, Jesus said her faith had caused her to be cured. Genuine faith involves action. Faith that is not put into action is no faith at all (Dunn & Rogerson 2003:1346).

### **3.3.2.3 Jesus Christ encounters the Canaanite woman**

In another story relating the story of Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:24,26, Jesus portrayed Himself as a male Jew of His day, when the woman implored Him to heal her daughter. The Matthean account suggests that Jesus ignored the woman's request when He answered:

I was sent to only the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It is not fair to take the children's (Israel's) bread and throw it to the dogs (Gentiles).

According to Barclay (1975:177-179) in Jesus' conversation with the Gentile woman by calling her a "dog" was a symbol of dishonour. It was "a Jewish term of contempt for the

Gentiles". Jesus, however, used a diminutive implying a pet, minimising any offence. In Greek, diminutives are characteristically affectionate, his voice and eyes might have helped the woman not to take any offence at the use of the term (Barclay 1975:177-179). Jesus was in a Gentile territory and therefore He could have symbolically been wiping out the distinction between clean and unclean people, the distinction between Jews and Gentiles (Young 1967:541). Both Mark 7:24-30 and Matthew 15:21-28 describe the same event. However, the woman's response to Jesus' teasing statement not only led to the granting of her wish of healing the daughter but something more. She received from Jesus Christ the highest accolade: "Great is your faith!" She might have come to the realisation that the "true Israel will transcend the boundaries of culture and nationality" (France 1985:245-248).

#### **3.3.2.4 Jesus Christ encounters the Roman Centurion**

Dunn and Rogerson (2003:1390-1391) hold that in Luke 7:1-10, Jesus entered into Capernaum and met the elders of the Jews who were sent by a Roman Centurion to ask Jesus if He would come and heal his servant who was seriously sick. A Centurion was an army officer in-charge of 100 foot soldiers. He came to Jesus not as a magician with charms, but because he believed Jesus had been sent from God (Dunn & Rogerson 2003:1390-1391). Apparently he realised that the Jews had God's message for mankind. The Centurion previously had provided funds to build a synagogue, a most unusual indication of his wealth and close ties to the whole Jewish community. Thus it was natural for him to turn to Jesus in his need. Why did the Centurion send Jewish elders to Jesus instead of going himself? Well aware of the Jewish hatred for Roman soldiers, he may not have wanted to interrupt a Jewish gathering. As an army captain,

he delegated jobs and sent groups on missions on daily basis, so this was how he chose to get his message to Jesus (Dunn & Rogerson 2003:1390-1391).

Matthew 8:5 says the Roman Centurion visited Jesus himself, while Luke 7:3 says he sent Jewish elders to present his request to Jesus. In dealing with the messengers, Jesus was dealing with the Centurion (Dunn & Rogerson 2003:1390-1391). For his Jewish audience, Matthew emphasised the man's faith. For his Gentile audience, Luke highlighted the good relationship between the Jewish elders and the Roman army captain. The Roman Centurion did not come to Jesus, and he did not expect Jesus to come to him. Just as he did not need to be present to have his orders carried out, so Jesus did not need to be present to heal him. The faith of the Centurion was amazing because he was a Gentile who had not been brought up to know a loving God (Dunn & Rogerson 2003:1390-1391). Luke reports Jesus' great commendation to the Roman Centurion:

And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying to him, 'Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. For I am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, go and he goes; and to another come, and he comes; and to my slave, do this and he does it. When Jesus heard this He marveled at him and turned and said to the multitude that followed Him, 'I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith'(Lk 7:6-10).

Most of Jesus' commendations went to Gentiles who displayed rare faith. Naturally, an ethnically traditional Jew would not hold a natural enemy of the Jew in such high esteem. This is why He could praise Gentiles where necessary and condemn His fellow Jews when it was necessary. It is also true that Jesus identified with the Jews in all the

positive values (Hastings & Selbie 1950:447-449). However, He never allowed Himself to be bound by the negative ethnic aspects of that traditional culture. God's will and guidance were the determinants of Jesus' whole conduct. Jesus also noted the fact that some Gentiles possessed exemplary qualities of goodness.

However, the fact that Jesus was a Jew did not mean He shared in their ethnocentrism (Blauw 1962:68). He was known to participate in Jewish cultural life as far as it was consistent with God's will. Thus Jesus made room for Jews as well as for Gentiles (Sule-Saa 2000:35). Jesus appreciated the value of all peoples irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds. The ministry of Jesus was inclusive. He advocated the need for human sympathy to men of all races, but He rebuked any attempt to solve ethnic racial problems through expedient militancy (Figart 1973:102).

The story of the good Samaritan depicted the Samaritan as being more virtuous than the Jewish Priest and Levite (Lk 10:25-37). Jesus accepted Samaritans even when they were hostile to Him and would not welcome Him in their towns. Jesus rebuked His disciples when they suggested calling down fire to consume the Samaritans (Lk 9:51-56). He broke ethnically-cultural barriers between the Jews and the Samaritans as, for example, in the case of the Samaritan woman (Jn 4), or, as in the conversation with the Jewish Lawyer- hence the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37), and the account of the cleansing of the ten lepers (Lk 17:11-19).

It is very clear from the Bible that Jesus Christ cared about the problems of the needy foreigners with love and compassion (Mk 10:46f, Mtt 10:1-10, Lk 19:1-10ff). He fed the hungry, healed the sick, and raised the dead on occasion. Jesus shared people's

emotional life, entered into human joy and sympathy, expressing affection and a desire for human companionship and support (Bromiley 1992:1048). The social concern includes condemning unrighteousness as well (Erickson 2013:978). John the Baptist likewise condemned the sin of Herod, the ruler of his day, even though it cost him his liberty and eventually even his life (Lk 3:19-20, Mk 6:17-29). He agreed that racial bigotry was wrong (Du Toit et al 1998:55).

For Aboagye-Mensah (1999a:21), the passage indicates Jesus' own attitude to ethnic boundaries. He breaks them down by His action. It should be pointed out immediately that the general attitude and approach of Jesus to His ministry was not ethnocentric or tribalistic. He was not a slave to Jewish ethnocentrism. Christ made an effort to overcome the racial bigotry of His day. He was showing that the gulf caused by centuries of hatred and animosity could be bridged by one genuine expression of kindness and concern (Sequeira 2016:38ff).

### **3.4 The Apostles' approach to manage ethnicity**

The first disciples of Jesus Christ, however, were Jews by birth. They were very comfortable with their traditional culture, and their view of Gentiles was informed by the general Jewish perception (Gal 1:14). Even though Jesus had instructed the disciples to preach the gospel to all peoples, the disciples did not urgently do so (Sule-Saa 2000:33). It is unlikely that the disciples would have gone beyond the Jewish borders to preach the gospel at their own discretion if persecution had not come.

### **3.4.1 The Apostle Peter and ethnicity**

#### **3.4.1.1 The Church in Jerusalem**

According to Acts of the Apostles, the establishment of the Church in Jerusalem started with the scene on the day of Pentecost (Act 2: 9-11). Pilgrims of “the devoted men,” both the Jews and probably the proselytes from all the nations under heaven” were presently identified as having come to live in Jerusalem from the nations at the eastern end of the Mediteranean basin in four quadrants, with Jerusalem at the centre (Dunn & Rogerson 2003:1215-1218). Members of the community lived together with one mind in service and fellowship- *koinonia*,- as public witnesses and because of their persistent adherence to the Jewish traditions, both in the temple and their homes (Act 2:42-46). The Church in Jerusalem was further characterised by prayer, performance of wonders and signs, displaying grace towards all the people and having the goodwill of all the people (Act 2:19, 22, 42, 43, 47).

In Acts, the initial incident that challenged the Church of Jerusalem was division between the Hellenistic–Greek-speaking widows and the Hebrew-and Aramaic-speaking believers (Acts 6:1-6). The Greek-speaking widows among the new converts were being neglected in the distribution of relief food. The Hellenistic widows were sidelined on culturally-ethnic basis, not on practically- logistical grounds (Wedderburn 2004:44-45). The Hellenistic widows were discriminated against because the distribution of items took place within the gatherings of the Aramaic-speaking Christians; and the Hellenistic widows did not take part in the activities because they could not understand the Aramaic language (Dunn & Rogerson 2003:1215-1218). Instead, they

attended their own Greek-speaking gatherings elsewhere; just as the Greek-speaking Jews would gather in their own synagogue and conduct worship and affairs in the ethnic-Greek language. The Relief aid was probably meals shared in the two linguistically- separated and intolerant communities (Carson & Moo 2005:32).

However, since the first disciples of Jesus Christ were Jews and proselytes, they felt comfortable with their traditional cultures (Gal 1:14). Even though Jesus had instructed the disciples to preach the gospel to all the people, they did not urgently do so (Sule-Saa 2000:33). The disciples were comfortable to stay in Jerusalem and remained there until the initial challenge of persecution broke out (Act 5:17-39, Act 7,12). The evidence in Acts seems to suggest that God always took the initiative to get the gospel preached among the Gentiles. In His mercy He enabled them to bear witness to the people from whom they were seeking shelter. It was only after a great persecution broke out against the church following Stephen's death, that the believers were compelled to leave Jerusalem (Dunn & Rogerson 2003:1215-1218). As they moved to Judea, and Samaria, they preached the gospel (Act 7, 8:1, Act 12). The persecution moved them to go out of Jerusalem and venture into missions (Acts 8:1-ff).

In Acts 10, God Himself convinced Peter in a vision to go to Cornelius to present the message of salvation of Jesus. Peter's obedience to God's revelation made him confess:

Truly I now perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him (Acts 10: 34).

Peter was surprised to find that God was ahead of him and had prepared the Gentile family of Cornelius, to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ (Sule-Saa 2000:36). Peter was

further astounded to find that the Gentiles were given the Holy Spirit in the same way as the Jews. Not all the Jewish Christians came to understand that they had to transcend their ethnic and cultural prejudice in order to bring the gospel of Jesus to the Gentiles. That explains why Peter had to defend himself before the Jewish believers after the Cornelius' episode.

In Acts 11: 1-17, Luke records the reaction of the conservative Jewish believers to the news that the Gentiles too had received the gospel. Peter had to face the conservative Jews who did not like Peter's action. Peter went up to Jerusalem, where the circumcised party criticised him, saying: "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?"(Sule-Saa 2000:37). Peter explained to them:

I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision. And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat'. But I said, 'No, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth'. But the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common. And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to withstand God? (Act 11: 1-17).

Peter explained to the Jewish Christians that what he had done was on God's specific instruction. God had unequivocally instructed him to come out of his ethnocentrism and go out to the Gentiles (Sule-Saa 2000:37).

### **3.4.2 The Apostle Paul and ethnicity**

#### **3.4.2.1 The Church in Antioch**

According to Acts 11:19-30, the Church in Antioch, the third city of the Roman Empire, started after the persecution and death of Stephen in Jerusalem. Some of the disciples travelled to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch preaching the message to Jews only. However, “men” from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ (Dunn & Rogerson 2003:1244-1245). The “Lord’s hand was with them and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord”. When news reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas to Antioch (Act 11:19-22). The Church in Antioch consolidated the inclusive character of the community, for each newly established assembly in Asia Minor comprised Gentiles as well as Jews. The message was given to both Jews and Gentiles to ensure that the communities which were established were truly inclusive, before they returned to Jerusalem (Dunn & Rogerson 2003:1238-1240).

However, in Acts 15:1-5, the question of circumcision is reflected upon extensively. The Jewish believers who belonged to the Pharisees party “came down from Judea to Antioch” and were teaching in the church: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” Then some of the Jewish believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and are required to obey the Law of Moses.” (Gen 15:5, 17:1-14, 21-27). The Jews from the Pharisees party insisted that Gentile believers be circumcised in the same way as the Jews before becoming Christians (Monser 1960:361-362).

Circumcision was a rite of cutting off the foreskin of a Jewish boy's penis on the eighth day of his life. God reconfirmed his covenantal promise to Abraham for the third and last time: "Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people" (Gen 17:14, Richards 1985:167). The uncircumcised Israelite was not covered by the covenantal promise given to Abraham. The rite symbolised submission to God and belief in his covenantal promise (Rom 4:16-20, Gal 3:26-29). The Jewish believers of the Pharisees party believed that they had the right to demand an ethnic - sociological likeness (via circumcision) besides the spiritual likeness. The Jews were asking the Gentiles to "become like us in order to belong to the church" (Rah 2010:114-116).

This debate on circumcision brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute with the Jewish believers who belonged to the party of Pharisees, which came to a head in the Jerusalem Council (Sule-Saa 2000:38). James, the prominent leader at the Jerusalem Church in support of Peter explained that God had visited and looked favourably on the Gentiles (Acts 15:14, cf Lk 1:68) and by incorporating "a people" (*laos*) from the Gentiles (Act 15:14), God had brought about "redemption for His people" (Lk 1:68). In Scripture, the term *laos* often referred to Israel (Ex 6:7, Deut 4:20, 34, 14:2, 26:18-19, 42:9), but the incorporation of the Gentiles into His people then reflected the promise of Zechariah 2:14-15:

Many nations shall join themselves to the Lord on that day, and they shall be my people.

The apostle James then provided further scriptural validation of the inclusion of Gentiles within the Church (Act 15:15-18). He cited the agreement of a compilation of scriptural texts, viz: Jeremiah 12:15, Amos 9:11-12, and Isaiah 45:21: "All nations will seek out the

Lord,” and affirms that this process is one which “the Lord has been making known from long ago”. James then indicated that: “I have reached the decision,” that will be crucial in bringing the council to agreement (Act 15:19, Dunn & Rogerson 2003:1244-1245).

The apostle argued that “those among the Gentiles who turn to God should not be troubled”, (Acts 14:15) and he proposed a compromising position which nevertheless retains a clear scriptural basis (Act 15:20): no idol food (Ex 34:11-17, Lev 17:8-9), no sexual immorality(Lev 18:6-29, no strangled animals (Ex 22:31, Lev 17:10-16), no equating what is torn with something strangled (Lev 17:15), no blood eating (Gen 9:4 Deut 12:15-16, 23-25)etc. By abstaining from sexual uncleanness and from unclean food, the Gentiles would avoid the principle sources of impurity with which they might contaminate the Jews. Thus would be removed what, in the Jewish eyes, was an obstacle to the sharing of meals, including that of the Eucharist, by the Jews and the Gentiles. The Gentiles would be required to conform to certain provisions of Jewish law, though not to undergo male circumcision (Dunn & Rogerson 2003:1531). The Jerusalem Church accepted the four requirements with no dissent and letters were written on the decision to all church assemblies in Asia Minor. The compromise helped the church to grow unhindered concerning the cultural differences between the Jews and the Gentiles (Monser 1960:361-362).

Therefore, when the Christian believers share the message of salvation across ethnically-cultural and economic boundaries, they must be sure that the requirements of faith, they set up are God’s not people’s. Unfortunately the Jews did not fully understand the meaning of baptism after a person had received the message of salvation. They still kept to the Old Testament tradition of the law of Moses. The New Testament holds that

Abraham was justified by faith even while he was uncircumcised, years before the rite was given. Circumcision was a sign: “a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised” (Rom 4:11 cf Gen 17:10-27). The sign of circumcision was not carried over into the church. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised.

Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts (1 Cor 7:18-19).

The Apostle Paul’s point is that God has never been concerned for the symbol as a thing in itself. God cares about the reality. Richards holds that our heart’s response to Him counts (Richards 1985:167-168):

It is we who are the true circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Jesus Christ, and who put no confidence in the flesh (Phil 3:3, Richards 1985:167-168).

After receiving salvation, undergoing circumcision was not necessary. Baptism then replaced circumcision. The inclusion of Gentiles within the Jewish Messianic assemblies was validated directly by God (Dunn & Rogerson 2003:1244-1245). After the second Jerusalem Council, Paul and Barnabas felt vindicated. The decision of the council reasserted the validity of inclusive church communities and promulgated the decision more widely (Dunn & Rogerson 2003:1239). God also required a “circumcision of the heart” (Deut 10:16, 30:6, Jer 4:4), explained as a faith-rooted, heart-and-soul love for God that issues in obedience (Richards 1985:167). In Act 17:26 – 27, Paul explained that:

From one human being, God created all races on earth and made them live throughout the whole earth. He himself fixed beforehand the exact times and the limits of the places where they would live. He did this so that they would look for him (Sule-Saa 2000:38).

### 3.4.2.2 The Church in Rome

Historical records indicate that the letter of apostle Paul to the Romans was written to inspire both the Jews and the Gentiles who were ethnically-divided in the church (Cowan 2004:85-90f). Some years later, Emperor Claudius expelled Jewish people from Rome (Murray 1959: xviiiff). The Jewish Christians such as Aquila and Priscilla settled elsewhere (Act 18:2). Due to the expulsion, the Church in Rome was probably composed largely of Gentiles for a number of years before Emperor Claudius died and the Jewish Christians returned. Therefore, both the Jewish and the Gentile congregations with different traditional practices and values then had to coexist, but their differences created ethnic cultural tension, animosity and conflict (Cowan (2004:85-90f).

The Jewish people often held ethnic feelings about their origin and culture. They believed that they were saved because they were Abraham's special children, and that they were part of an exclusively saved people because they had the covenant of circumcision (Monser 1960:361-362). The apostle Paul was concerned with the interests of both Jews and Gentiles in Rome (Dunn & Rogerson 2003:1215-1218). He frequently wrote letters to condition them to promote one another (Murray 1959:xix). Paul reminded the believers in Rome that what mattered was the faith-based spiritual circumcision of the heart. The Jewish special privileges did not guarantee salvation (Rom 9:4, 5).

In Romans, Paul urged the church to break and surmount the historical and cultural barriers as God had established namely: the ethnic barrier between Jews and Gentiles through faith in Christ (cf. Gal 2:28). He reminded the Christian members in Rome, that

their unity and diversity in the gospel transcended their differences (Rom 1:16, 10:12, 13). He confirmed that Gentiles as well as Jews are all lost (Rom 1:18-17, 2:12-29). All people are sinners before God's judgment (Rom 2:9, 3:9), and all people are equally lost, and ought then to be saved on the same terms through common faith in Christ (Carson & Moo 2005:40ff).

### **3.4.2.3 The Church in Corinth**

Corinth was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia to which nearly the whole of Greece and Macedonia belonged. The city was the residence of many Jews and Gentiles who had converted to Christianity (Murray 1954:13-18). Corinth was also home to Governor Gallio in 51-52 AD (Act 18:12f). The Epistle itself claims that Paul wrote it at Ephesus during his third missionary journey (1 Cor 16:8). People from every part of the great Roman Empire, especially seamen and merchants came together at Corinth. There too all the Gentiles brought with them their special sinful behaviour such as immorality, drunkenness, and dissipation that was the order of the day (1 Cor 5:1-12). The Christians were unfortunately influenced by many of these sinful behaviours (Act 18:1-4 cf 1 Cor 7:1ff), and Paul writes to address the undesirable sins of the flesh (1 Cor 6:9-11). The apostle Paul writes to censure and correct the sinful behaviour of the Corinthian believers.

The other problems existing in the Church of Corinth were based on ethnic divisions and lack of harmony (Plueddemann 2009:177). Members of the church were divided as to which leader they would follow (1 Cor 1:10-17, 3:1-9). Social cliques or factions which were formed could be evident at the gatherings of the church (1 Cor 11:17-19). Individual- ethnic loyalties tended to boast in personal preferences: leaders were appointed into office because they belonged to Apollo's ethnic party or that of Paul's.

The apostle Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians' Church to censure Christian believers that Christian solidarity could not be based on the leader or ethnicity, for certainly Christ could not be divided. Paul contends that such believers were not spiritual, but carnal, babies in Christ (1 Cor 3:1). Paul writes that the church is like a body, each member had an individual function so that the whole body would work together in unity through Christ. God's absolute solution to the disharmony in Corinth was indicated in the doctrine of diversity of gifts in chapters 13 and 14 (Plueddemann 2009:177).

The church is a new community of God. It is a new community established by Christ. Christian solidarity ought to be based on gifts: *charisma* and *diakonia*. These are gifts given to the church for service. Ethnic loyalty could not be the norm in the church of Jesus Christ for - in Christ, cultural and social barriers have been removed, as Paul indicates:

Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free, but Christ is all, and is in all (Gal 3:28, Col 3:11, 1 Cor 6:14-7:1).

### **3.5 The scriptural attempts to break ethnic divisions in the church**

#### **3.5.1 A church based on calling and faith**

The Scripture indicates that Abraham was called to be God's agent for His mission to the rest of the people. God made a covenant with Abraham to be His chosen servant to give him descendants, land and become a blessing to the nations (Gen 12, 13, 18). The *qahal* is related to the calling of the assembly for covenantal people who belong to God (Brown 1975:293-294). God created a people distinct from all others, nurtured it in the isolation of the wilderness, and granted it arable land in which to dwell through

conquest. Israel knew itself to be both lasting with and radically separate from other peoples (Mcbride Jr, 1988:14), and as such it entailed *qahal* which is an assembly, a congregation including women and children, the gathering of troops and nations other than Israel; for instance, people designated as proselytes from Egypt, Tyre, Assyria (1 King 8:65; 12: 3ff, Jer 44:15 Ezek 17:17, 27:27, 32:22, Brown 1975:293-294ff).

However, God has always been very involved in the histories of all ethnic people groups. Through His mercy God has left His imprints on ethnic groups as revealed by their cultures. The blessings of God on ethnic groups were not limited to Israel alone. Israel herself benefited immensely from her neighbours (Gottwald, 1985:55f). Therefore from the inception of God's election of Israel, Abraham, the founder of the nation of Israel was made aware of the responsibility to be a holy people to redeem the world and establish God's Kingdom. Abraham was to be the father of nations and not only of Israel. The prophets often impressed on their fellow Israelites that they were meant to be witnesses to the Gentile nations (Aboagye-Mensah 1999b: 21). The purpose of the calling is that all the ethnic groups would be brought to worship Him in their diversities. Ethnicity is central in the salvation history of God and humanity (Aboagye-Mensah, 1999b:21).

### **3.5.2 The church based on Christ's new identity**

In the New Testament, both the Jewish believers and the Gentiles were accepted as full members of the *qahal* or *ekklesia*. A proselyte in the Old Testament is a Gentile who has converted to Judaism, is bound to all the doctrines and precepts of the Jewish religion and is accepted as full member of the Jewish people (Deut 5:14, 16:11-14). The history of the proselytes in Israel indicates that the Law of Moses made specific

regulations regarding the admission into the *qahal*, people who were not born Israelites (Ex 20:10, 23:12, 12:19, 48).

Calvin maintained that the church had a corporate identity and authority which had been received from God (Gildenhuis 2002:34). The new identity is given to the people of God who receive the message of salvation in their ethnic-traditional culture. Christ is the new identity. The church is the new people of God, made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and created by His Spirit living in their midst (Du Plooy 1982:52f). The church is the new community of the resurrection, the fellowship of men in whom God's Spirit dwells, the fraternity of the forgiven, the people who are called out of the world (Miller 1957:13-16).

The *ekklesia*, church is a unity in diversity and diversity amid unity in the identification with Christ. *Pluriformity* is unacceptable; it implies acceptance of sinful division so that the point of departure implies: reality ruptured by sin. Plurality is preferable, namely, that one church exists among all peoples, languages and nations (Du Plooy 1982:5). The Christian community was called "Christians", for the first time to differentiate it from the Jewish community synagogue (Act 2:47, 11:26, Zodiates 1992:541). The salvation of Christ encompasses not just souls, but culture as well at its deepest level. Therefore, the *ekklesia* implies the new community in Christ's salvation (Mtt 16:18, Act 2:44, 47, Gal 1:13, Eph 1:22, 1 Cor 10:32). The church needs to allow Scripture to become the interpreter of who she is in the specific concrete sense of cultures and traditions. The church must inevitably manage ethnicity based on the new identity in Christ. Therefore, the contemporary church has a new cultural community based on Christ.

### **3.5.3 A church based on the removal of ethnic social barriers**

The gospel of Christ removes ethnic and social barriers. The proclamation of the kingdom and Christ's actions had a dual effect: it unified and separated people; Christ's proclamation of the kingdom leads to the formation of the church (Mtt 16:18). The New Testament Scripture indicates that God has given the church the gospel message of reconciliation. Berkhof (1962:59) holds that in Colossians 1:1ff, Paul advocates for the message of reconciliation saying: "Christ reconciles all things in heaven and on earth to Himself". Reconciliation with God necessarily includes the reconciliation of those who are estranged. In 2 Corinthians 5: 18-21, it says:

That God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. Moreover, he has committed to us the message of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-21).

The barriers that people set up against each other, in order to maintain their position, and to put down others, ought to be broken down through mission and fellowship of Christ (Moltmann 1977:351, Van Ruler 1969:139). God's ministry of reconciliation is the only driving force strong enough to tear down the walls of ethnicity and racism that still exist in our world including in the church too (Broocks 2002:93). God has acted graciously in Christ to unite that, which is estranged. This affects a Kingdom where all can come and all are welcome. The house will not only be "full" in the sense that there is no room, but "full" in the way a family table is "full" when all are present. In this case, however, it is the welcome of every sort and without condition (Van Ruler 1969:138). No one is left because he or she is of the wrong "sort", whichever way that "sort" may be determined. This fullness is possible, and hence catholicity finds expression. For this reason, one can talk about the heterogeneity that includes a mix of people from different political persuasions, social-economic, and cultural backgrounds.

The New Testament Scripture indicates that the message of Christ contains the enduring love of God to the world (Jn 3:16, 17:3, 1 Jn 3:1-10). In the gospels, the greatest commandment is to love God and one's neighbour (Mk 12: 28-34, Jn 15: 9-15, cf 1 Cor 13, 14). The heterogeneous nature of the universal church has generally been reflected in the local church where "an absolute universalism" is practised, there are no political boundaries, sex, age, status, nationality and language" (Janssen 2011:100).

God longs for all ethnic groups to be converted and to carry on His salvation mission to the world. Consequently, when all ethnic groups come under Christ's discipleship, a process is set in place to remove the negative tendencies of other ethnic tradition within them which is also part of the process of redemption. Christ longs to redeem all ethnic groups so that He can use them to fulfil His mission. Redeemed ethnicity can, therefore, be an asset rather than a liability (Sule-Saa 2000:38).

The Old Testament covenant always pointed to how the New Testament gospel would be open to all (Sivasundaram 2008:1ff). When people turn to Christ as their Lord, they turn over to Him all that has defined and shaped them. In the New Testament Scripture, God calls people from all nations to worship Him (Jn 4:23-24, Mk 11:17 cf Isa 56:7).

#### **3.5.4 A church based on ethnic integration**

The gospel of Christ moves barriers and makes people of God to integrate. The New Testament Scriptures indicated the equality and integration of members in the church (Act 4:42-46, 5, 6). In Galatians 3:13-14, Paul argued that the covenant blessing of Abraham was also extended to the Gentiles through belief and confession in Christ (Rom 10:9-12). In Acts 10:34, Peter led by the Spirit proclaimed in Cornelius' house:

I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right (Acts 10:34).

In Acts 15: 19, Peter argued against imposing Jewish customs on the Gentile believers so that: “we should not trouble the Gentiles who are turning to God.” Paul in Galatians 3:13-14, 28 declared in his message that in the church:

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

In the New Testament in Ephesians, the apostle Paul particularly emphasizes the universal or catholic nature of the church. The church is Christ’s body and all things are under Him (1:22-23); the church makes known the manifold wisdom of God (3:10) and will glorify Him to all generations (3:21). The proclamation of the kingdom and Christ’s actions had a dual effect: it unified and separated people; Christ’s proclamation of the kingdom leads to the formation of the church (Mtt 16:18).

Jesus’ own ministry was directed at Jews and Gentiles. In the gospels, Christ gives His disciples the greatest commandment of all as loving God and one’s neighbour (Mk 12: 28-34, Jn15: 9-15, cf 1 Cor 13, 14). His mission to the Jews was expected to set the context for Gentile reception of the message (Sivasundaram 2008:1-2). An ethnic background is the raw material that God works on in His transformation of His people. God’s call always implies that certain aspects of our ethnicity would have to be moderated. Ethnicity is central in the salvation history of God and humanity (Aboagye-Mensah 1999a:21).

This underscores the fact that there is nothing strange in belonging to a particular ethnic group. The contemporary church can faithfully participate in all positive aspects of our ethnic groups and still be used by God to accomplish His mission in the world (Akrong & Gyan-Duah in Sule-Saa 2000:33). The diverse nature of the church has generally been reflected in the local church where “an absolute universalism” is practised; there are no

political boundaries, sex, age, status, nationality and language” (Janssen 2011:100). God calls people from all nations to worship Him (Jn 4:23-24, Mk 11:17 cf Isa 56:7).

The local congregation of believers should seek to live in unity and diversity. Corporate worship may thus involve the coming together of peoples from multiple backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, class and age, to glorify God and to help each other to follow Him (Sivasundaram 2008:9f). The early church was committed to worship service, a further means of bringing glory to God beyond nationalities (1 Pet 2:12, cf. Milne 1982:224). The worship goes to God from our hearts in gratitude through prayer and praise. Nevertheless, worship consists also in service. True praise to God involves the surrender of all one is and has, to be used as an instrument in His hands for accomplishing what He wants done in the world. True worship involves “devoting the will to the purpose of God” (Sivasundaram 2008:9f).

However, ethnic and cultural divisions manifest in different ways in the nations of the earth (Broocks 2002:95). In Africa where thousands of tribes, with ethnic ties and races live, ethnicity leads to a scrambling for space and scarce resources bringing numerous conflicts. In America, the issue is primarily racial segregation between blacks and whites. In India, it is the caste system. In Indonesia, the indigenous Indonesians are pitted against the Chinese-Indonesians. One common characteristic of all such cultural schisms is a long, often horrific history of offences that fuel mistrust, bitterness, suffering and even death. It is here where we find the root of ethnic divisions even among Christian believers. These hot issues can run very deeply and be quite complex (Broocks 2002:95).

Most people have a tendency to pride themselves on their own ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This is something that has value in and of itself and it helps people measure themselves against other people (Sivasundaram 2008:6f). Ethnicity and ethnic divisions though breed deceit and mistrust among the leadership of the church. This impact of ethnicity and ethnic divisions, if not checked, could bring disastrous consequences to the church and society (Cordell & Wolff 2010:4-5). When appropriated properly, ethnicity and ethnic divisions could be the positive ingredients that guarantee the realization of the idea of civil society by enhancing participation, integration of loyalties and commitment to the public good of the church and society (Tarimo 2000:7ff).

### **3.6 Chapter summary**

This chapter discussed the question of how ethnicity was managed in the New Testament Church. The main question here was as follows: how was ethnicity managed in the New Testament Church? The aim of the chapter was to indicate that ethnicity existed as a recurrent problem based on traditional cultures between the Jewish believers who spoke Aramaic and the Hellenistic believers from the diaspora who spoke Greek and how the early church managed them. To assist in the study, the following structure was used:

- Understanding God's call for ethnic groups in the Scripture.

The Lord God called Abraham from an ethnic group. The people of Israel were called to be God's agents in His mission to the rest of the people of God in the world. God called Abraham to begin a "nation" that would embrace all the other ethnic groups in God's kingdom (cf. Gen 12:1-8, 15:1-7, 17:1-16).

- Jesus Christ's approach to manage ethnicity.

Jesus Christ was born into a Jewish ethnic group and participated in the cultural practices of the Jewish people according to the Mosaic law, conformed to temple practices, engaged in synagogue worship, and throughout His life lived as a Jew. Jesus crossed all ethnic and cultural barriers to share the gospel with the Gentiles. The ministry of Jesus was inclusive. He advocated the need for human sympathy to men of all races and He rebuked any attempt to solve ethnic racial problems by expedient militancy.

- Scripture approach to manage ethnicity.

The first disciples of Jesus Christ were Jews and they were comfortable with their traditional culture and their view of Gentiles was informed by the Jewish perception. The disciples went beyond the Jewish borders to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, despite persecution. The gospel is for every person, no matter what his or her race, social position or past sin. Christ longs to redeem all ethnic groups so that He could use them to fulfil His mission of salvation (Mtt 28:16-20, Mk 16:16-20, Act 1:7-8).

- The scriptural attempts to break the ethnic divisions in the church.

The church is the new people of God, made possible by belief in Christ and the confessions. Christ is the new identity for Christian believers. The diverse nature of the church must be reflected in the local church. The church must manage ethnicity and ethnic divisions based on the new identity in Christ. The contemporary church is a unity in its diversity yet displays diversity amid unity. The contemporary church has a new identity based on Christ.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the question of how ethnicity was managed in the New Testament Church. The aim of the chapter was to indicate that ethnicity existed as a recurrent problem based on the traditional culture between the Jewish believers who spoke Aramaic language and the Hellenistic believers from the diaspora who spoke Greek and how the early church managed them. The purpose of God's creation and calling is that all the ethnic groups would be brought to worship Him in their diversities. When all ethnic groups come under Christ's discipleship, a process is set in place to remove the negative tendencies within them. God longs for all ethnic groups to be converted and get new identities as God's people in Christ in order to fulfill God's mission in the world. The goal is not necessarily to stop being who we are ethnically and culturally, but to understand what it means to be in Christ, to understand how ecclesiology and soteriology could interact in the contemporary church (Gal 3: 28).

The contemporary Christian believers must faithfully participate in all the positive aspects of our ethnic groups and still be used by God to accomplish His mission (Akrong & Gyan-Duah in Sule-Saa 2000:33). For the sake of ethnic diversity, the contemporary Christians may probably participate in their own cultural life as long as it can not go against God's will. The contemporary Christian believers may also transcend ethnocentrism and see the positive values in other ethnic groups. God's ministry of reconciliation is the only driving force strong enough to tear down the walls of ethnicity and racism that still exist in our world including the church (Broocks 2002:93). Ethnicity is not necessarily evil, for Jesus made good use of it and paved the way for His followers to continue His mission along similar lines (Sule-Saa 2000:33). However,

God's dealings with Israel as history of the growth of the church from one culture to another, makes the study of ethnicity imperative (Sule-Saa 2000:1).

Failure to acknowledge the existence of ethnicity can lead to ethnocentrism or tribalism which is an enemy to God's mission. God's mission essentially reconciles, unites and enriches people from different ethnic groups whilst ethnocentrism or tribalism excludes, divides and impoverishes them (Sule-Saa 2000:1). The salvation of Christ cuts across ethnicity and ethnic divisions, barriers and boundaries. Christ is universal; He is both the Lord and saviour of Israel and of the world. Hence, in the new people of God, the divisions that destroy humanity will already be deprived of their force. In Christ, people have a new identity.

Hence, no authority can establish boundaries that separate people in an essential way (Berkhof 1962:80). Of course, boundaries exist: national political frontiers, language barriers and culturally- historical differences and racial colouring (Koffeman & Smit 2014:101). God's Kingdom encompasses all, and this is accomplished in Christ. The ethnic barriers that people set up against one another, in order to proudly maintain their own position, and to put down others, must be broken down through their new identity in Christ! This must occur through faith, by reconciliation of the Christian believers with one another, and by engaging in mission and fellowship of Christ to the world (Moltmann 1977:351, Van Ruler 1969:139).

In the New Testament Scripture, Jesus Christ and the apostles thought it important enough to supersede a straying from ethnic tradition with gracious gestures and activities for both Jews and Gentiles. Therefore, the contemporary church should take

heed that the Christian believers are not swallowed up in the river of ethnicity today. The goal is not necessarily to stop being who we are ethnically and culturally, but to understand what it means to be in Christ, to understand how ecclesiology and soteriology could interact in the contemporary church (Gal 3: 28).

In the biblical context, an Israelite ethnical group and its cultural distinctions are acknowledged for purposes of God's calling and mission to the Gentiles in the world. However, both the Jews and the Gentiles are accepted to become God's new identity in Christ to celebrate diversity of cultures in the Kingdom of God. Therefore, in Scripture ethnic diversity amongst the people of God in Christ, is supported and celebrated as "colouring" for this world and beyond (Walden 2015:26). This is how the question of ethnicity was managed in the New Testament Church for its health, enrichment and greater capacity for growth.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Church governance in the light of the New Testament**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter will reflect on the Scripture and historical sources to determine principles of church government applied in the multicultural New Testament Church. The main question stated for this chapter will be: which principles of church government apply in the organisation in the multicultural New Testament Church? To assist in the study, the following structure will be used:

- The Kingdom of God.

- Offices.
- Local church.
- The church and state.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate from scriptural principles of church government applied in the organisation in the New Testament Church in the Reformed Church polity perspective. Underlying this concept of church government is a specific concept of church. The nature of the church determines the essential aspects needed for the government of the specific community (Smit 2018:2f). The concepts of church and church government are, therefore, determined by Scripture in the Reformed church polity perspective. A scriptural concept of church does not bring church government in conflict with the nature of the church, but aligns it with the scriptural view of church government (Smit 2018:2f). The scriptural principles of the New Testament Church are pillars on which the legitimate Presbyterian system of church government rests as the basis for assessing the ethnically-hierarchical based system in the church. The principles of church government applied in the New Testament Church according to Scripture, are as follows:

#### **4.2 The Kingdom of God**

The point of departure for the legitimate church polity is about the Kingdom of God; and how Christ as the Head of the Kingdom of God governs the church. The Kingdom of God is not only the objective, but also the central point for the message of the New Testament (Mk 1:14-15, Mk 4:20-33, Mtt 12:25-37, 24:14, Act 1:6-8, Col 1:15-23, Eph 1:3-23, Phil 2:6-12). In the New Testament Church, the primary idea of the Kingdom of God is that of the rule of God, which is established and acknowledged in the hearts of

sinners, by the powerful regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit, insuring them of the inestimable blessings of salvation (Vorster 2011:8-10).

The kingdom of God has become a reality in the person, words and works of Christ; yet it is also the starting point, as well as the final breakthrough, of a single comprehensive movement that will culminate in the day of Judgement (Du Plooy 1982:3). Therefore, Christ's actions and the proclamation of the kingdom had a dual effect: it unified and separated people; Christ's proclamation of the kingdom leads to the formation of the church (Mtt 16:18). In other words, the church is the direct result of the proclamation of the kingdom; the church is the domain where people profess His supremacy and wish to obey Him as their King and Lord (Du Plooy 1982:3).

The understanding of the government of Christ's church must begin with the Lord Himself and His Kingdom's authority. He is the Head of the church; He rules through gifted church officers (Clowney 1995:202). His Sovereign authority encompasses the office, gift or *charismata* as service, the church and the state. Everything belongs to God. God governs in Christ over the entire cosmos (Calvin in Smit 2013:133f). The Kingdom of God includes all forms of authority and governance: the differences in the government of different institutions are all under the authority of Christ given to Him in heaven and on earth (Smit 2013:135f, Mtt 28:18). He governs in "an extraordinary way" in the church through the Word and Spirit according to Scripture and Reformed Church polity. The authority of Christ is vested in the preaching of the Word of God through the illumination of the Holy Spirit (Du Plooy 1982:107). The apostle Peter also praised Christ by saying:

Who is gone into heaven, and is seated on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers are being subject to him (1 Pet 3:22).

This reign has already been manifested in the coming of Christ, but will be revealed in its completeness at the end of time. The reign of God is a present and future reality (Ridderbos 1975:343f). The objective of the church order is to serve the establishment of God's order and law in His body or church through the ministry of the Word, the sacraments and discipline by means of which the kingdom of God is unlocked for His church (Du Plooy 1982:107). In essence, the Kingdom of God is about the reign of God through Christ in the life of the church. Christ supremely reigns differently in all respects from earthly kings. All believers in Christ are unconditionally bound to obey the Word of the King. As Christ is the only sovereign Ruler of the church, His Word is the only word that is law in the absolute sense.

### **4.3 Offices**

In the Old Testament dispensation, leadership functioned primarily through God's sanctioned offices of prophet, priest and king. The New Testament concept of office could be seen as coming out of the Jewish synagogue heritage, which in turn has deep Old Testament roots (Van Gelder 2000:181). It is this office with which the first Jewish Christians were only too familiar, that continued in the Christian church under the direction of the apostles (cf 1 Cor. 11:22-25, 12:28; Eph. 4:11-12). Van Dam (2009:9-10) argues that if the offices of elder and teacher were clearly distinguished in the old dispensation, then one could expect this to be continued in the new dispensation, with a special teaching office in the Christian congregation in the New Testament Church. The Christian eldership is rooted in the Israelite and Jewish concept of an office. One must read the Scripture in its unity and take into account the Old Testament background of the offices as one may assume the first Jewish Christian believers did (Van Dam 2009:113).

According to the New Testament Scripture, Christ is the origin and source of the office (Mtt 28:19-20 Eph 4:11-12, 1 Cor 11:22-12). The office-bearers are “servants” who primarily receive their mandate to serve from Christ. They are the agents of Christ (Bouwman in Vorster 2011:15). One who holds the church “office” stands under obligation to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the church (Janssen 2000:17). Offices are instruments in the hands of Christ through which He institutes, conserves and builds the church (Vorster (2011:15). According to GKSA Church Order Article 1:

To maintain good order in the church of Christ, it is necessary that there should be offices; assemblies; supervision over doctrine, sacraments and ceremonies; and church discipline.

The office is a spiritual representation of God, and it is a mystical thing (Janssen 2006:125). An office-bearer is a representative of God. Therefore, offices are central to the understanding of the Reformed Church polity.

#### **4.3.1 Office is for service**

The gifts (*charismata*) are for service. *Charismata* and *diakoniam* are both sides of the same coin (Smit 2018:5). There is an inherent relationship between *charismata* and *diakoniam*. Christ gives the office as *charismata* to serve *diakoniam* and perform the threefold office of Christ as priest, prophet and king (Shin 2015:42-43). Christ uses different people groups in different ministries for this purpose. The church consists of offices and the congregation. Offices are essential not only in the church, but in a manifold way in the world, and central in the state. Gifts are moments in the work of the indwelling Spirit that mediate between Christ the Mediator and man (Janssen 2006:125).

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul writing in 1 Corinthians 14: 1, 4 spoke of the purpose of gifts of the Holy Spirit namely: for edification, exhortation and comfort. Christ has given the church, the gifts to accomplish the tasks of the church. Christ infers gifts upon a person to provide him the ability to execute a specific task; for edification and ongoing existence in this life (Smit 2018:5). The purpose of gifts given by Christ through the Spirit is for service and for building up the local church (cf 1 Cor. 6:9; Eph. 1:23; 1 Pet 2:20). Therefore, the *charismata* (gifts) and *ekklesia* (local church) are both serviceable to God's Kingdom's intentions with His world (Janssen 2006:125).

#### **4.3.2 The lawful calling for service**

In the New Testament Church, the gift for service is activated through the lawful calling by Christ. The gifts are activated in the church through calling by the Lord (Smit 2018:5). The service is confirmed by a conscious call in the local church. Christ accommodates human service in His church (Shin 2015:47ff). Calling is indicative of the way Christ runs his government over the church. No one except Christ has authority to govern over his church, because the one who bought the church with His blood also has the authority to determine the way in which the church should be governed(Smit 2018:5f). Through the authority in His Word and by the Holy Spirit, God gives certain persons as gifts to the congregation such as a shepherd and minister (Eph 4:11-12, 1 Cor 14:1, 4).

Therefore, Christ alone gives the lawful calling, mandate and authority of the office (Shin 2015:47ff). Christ uses different people in different ministries for this purpose. Officers in the church must have a mature Christian character. Anyone who is going to be an officer in the church must demonstrate maturity in exercising the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). Scripture assumes that leaders in the church were appointed based on

their *charisma* and skills. The Spirit gives spiritual gifts to all people in the church. Some gifts relate directly to leadership. It is the Spirit who prompts, motivates, and energizes a person with the appropriate gifts to exercise a leadership role (Eph 4:11-14).

In the Reformed Church perspective, Church Order Article 4 of the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA) stipulates that the lawful calling and admission of a person who has not previously served in the office of the Word, and who has been examined (preparatoir) by the classis, in which he resides, shall comprise the following:

First, after prayers have been said, the election ensues by the church council and deacons according to the customary local procedure or as determined by the church council; and, in churches with only one minister, with the advice of the classis or the counsellor appointed by the classis for this purpose. Secondly, examination by the classis (to whom the call shall be submitted for approval) into the doctrine and life of the person to be called, which shall involve the advice of the deputies appointed by the regional synod. Thirdly, approbation and approval by the members of the church in question, which implies that no legitimate objection was lodged after the name of the person to be called, had been announced in church for at least three Sundays. Finally, the public ordination of the person in the presence of the congregation and of the deputies of the classis according to the form prescribed for this purpose.

Shin (2015:47ff) holds that in the New Testament Church, the servants of God were given gifts (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6) and had an extraordinary calling, appointed by the apostles (Act 15:40; 16:3; Schaff 1998:412-414), or were set apart by the church (Act 11:22; 13:2; 2 Cor. 8:18-19, 23; Phil. 2:25; 1 Tim. 4:14) for the sake of extraordinary tasks. The extraordinary tasks of the evangelists were to take part in the ministries of the apostles. They had to apply and expand the ministries and effectiveness of the apostles, especially (Shin 2015:47ff). The evangelists were not limited to a local church. They travelled from place to place and preached the gospel (Act 8:5, 12, 40; 13:4; Tit.

1:5). Even though some worked separately, they were subject to (Act 19:22; 1Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:3; Tit. 1:5) and cooperated with the apostles (Bavinck 2008:336).

According to the Reformed Church view, Christ calls four different offices in the church namely: ministers of the Word, doctors or professors of theology, elders and deacons (Vorster 2011:15). The Acts of the National Synod of Gravenhage (1586), the ministry appeared in fourfold Calvinistic pattern: the ministers of the Word, the doctors (*doctorum munus*), the elders and the deacons (Henderson 1962:110-111). The church order indicated, by implication that the office of doctor (teacher) was that of professor in theology and stated that the office was “to explicate the Holy Scripture and to stand for doctrine against heresies and wrongdoers.”

The office of doctor (teacher) and the office of prophet under the gospel were clearly linked and Calvin never succeeded in drawing a completely clear line of distinction between them. The distinction he draws between prophets and doctors lay in the area of the intensity of the exercise of their didactic function. The New Testament Scriptures indicate that Paul wrote to the Ephesians in chapter 4:11 saying:

Moreover, He gave some, apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfection of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for edifying of the body of Christ.

According to Calvin: “All pastors are supposed to be doctors, but functionally and by office all doctors are not pastors,” (Calvin in Henderson 1962:31). Doe (2013:69-70) an Anglican Scholar argues that in Reformed view:

The “church related community workers” are prepared, trained, called, and commissioned to the “office.” They are inducted to serve in a particular post for a designated period, namely: to care for, to challenge and to pray for the community; to discern with others God’s will for the well- being of

the community; to endeavour to enable the church to live out its calling to proclaim the love and mercy of God through working with others in both church and community for peace and justice of the world. They may be stipendiary or non-stipendiary.

#### **4.3.2.1 Office of the church minister**

The church order for the GKSA, Church Order Article 4 provides for the lawful calling and admission of a person who has not previously served in the office of the Word, and who has been examined by the classis in which he resides, which shall comprise the following:

First, after prayers have been said, the election ensues by the church council and deacons according to the customary local procedure or as determined by the church council; and in churches with only one minister, with the advice of the classis or the counsellor appointed by the classis for this purpose. Secondly, examination by the classis into the doctrine and life of the person to be called, which shall involve the advice of the deputies appointed by the regional synod. Thirdly, approbation and approval by the members of the church in question, which implies that no legitimate objection was lodged after the name of the person to be called, had been announced in the church for at least three Sundays. Finally, the public ordination of the person in the presence of the congregation and of the deputies of the classis according to the form prescribed for this purpose.

The lawful call to office of church minister is a specialized one. The special ministry of the church minister may be exercised in different ways. The minister does not have special authority beyond that of the elders, except in as far as is due to his role and training. He is recognised only or called “expert” in the spiritual and theological life of the local congregation. Van Dam (2009:112) holds that the preaching of the gospel as a priestly task can also be seen elsewhere. A priest administered reconciliation between God and His people. The priest did this by way of offering sacrifices, teaching the law,

and giving the priestly blessing (Deut 10:8, 33:10). This ministry of reconciliation God gave to His apostles and their co-workers. The apostle Paul writes:

God gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. Moreover, He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:18-20).

The preaching of the Word of God is the ministry of restoring peace between God and human beings, a peace that had been lost because of sin (Rom 5:1, 10 Col 1:19-20). The ministry of reconciliation entrusted to the priests in the Old Testament, has been committed in the New Testament Church to Christ's ambassadors, such as Paul and his co-workers. As the priests in ancient Israel not only acted, but also spoke for God when teaching and explaining His Word to the people, so the ambassadors in the New Testament Church speak for God with authority given by Christ. The enduring ambassadorial office in the church is that of the minister or teaching elder. Those holding this office are charged to proclaim the Word of God in public worship services. The term used in Greek indicates the proclamation of a herald (Rom 10:14-15, 2 Tim 4:2). The Word is central in this proclamation, and this centrality is evident from the way the apostles posed their dilemma in Acts 6:2:

It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of God in order to wait on tables.

Preaching is officially ministering the Word, which is the Word of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:19). True proclamation does not take place through Scripture alone, but through its exposition, God does not send books to men, He sends messengers (Van Dam

2009:113). The office of preachers who proclaim, teach and expound the Scripture is an office of tremendous responsibility that demands gifts over and beyond what is common to both teaching and ruling elders. They require special gifts of understanding Scripture, the time and opportunity to dig into the riches of redemption, and the ability to expound and teach Scripture. The ministers of the Word, in essence, function as the mouthpiece of God and only they would be able to bless the congregation in worship services (2 Cor 5:20).

Shin (2015:49ff) holds that according to the Reformed Confessions, the mandates of the ministers of the Word are to preach the pure doctrine, to administer the pure sacraments, and to exercise the church discipline, and all those tasks are based on the Word of God. A minister engages in service of the Lord (and even the church) based on a religious calling. On behalf of his calling, a minister does not devote just his working life but his whole life to the church and religion. It is subsequently incongruous to argue that the basis of a minister's relationship to the church is one of service for economic gain (Shin 2015:44f).

Furthermore, a minister does not obtain rights and obligations by entering a contract of employment with a local congregation. The rights and obligations of a minister are determined by the public ordination. A ruling elder would simply read the blessing as given in Scripture, but not raise his hands, as this has always been the prerogative of the priest and, hence today, is that of the teaching elder (Van Dam 2009:116). With respect to their support, because in the Old Testament, the priests and Levites were employed full-time in the ministry of reconciliation, the Lord guaranteed the livelihood of the tribe of Levi by granting them the tithe as their inheritance (Num 18:21-24).

In the New Testament full-time specialized ministers of the gospel are likewise to receive their livelihood from the gospel (1 Cor 9:9-14). As in the Old Testament times, there is no general mandate for God's people to support the ruling elders. In 1 Timothy 5:17-18, it reads:

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose works are preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says: "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "the worker deserves his wages".

The teaching elder who labours in preaching and teaching, namely: the minister of the Word is to be honoured and such honour should include wages. The ruling elder should also be honoured and financial support is not necessarily excluded in showing that honour (Van Dam 2009:117). In Reformed Church tradition, church ministers are members of the local congregation and accountable to that particular congregation; subject to its council's discipline.

#### **4.3.2.2 Office of the doctor (*doctorum munus*)**

Henderson (1962:30-31) holds that the office of doctor (teacher) and the office of prophet under the gospel were clearly linked and Calvin never succeeded in drawing a completely clear line of distinction between them. The distinction he draws between prophets and doctors lay in the area of the intensity of the exercise of their didactic function. The gospel prophet had a slightly wider range of responsibility to make known:

The will of God by applying with dexterity and skilled prophecies, threatening, promises and the whole doctrine of the Scripture, to the present use of the church;" while the office of doctors (*doctorum munus*) "consists in taking care that sound doctrine be maintained and propagated in order that the purity of religion may be kept in the church."

In the Reformed view, by implication, the office of doctor (teacher) was that of professor in theology and stated that the office was “to explicate the Holy Scripture and to stand for doctrine against heresies and wrongdoers” (Henderson 1962:31ff).

#### **4.3.2.3 Office of an elder**

Van Dam (2009:9-10) holds that the New Testament Church just as the new Israel, retained the use of the old office of an elder. The Christian eldership is rooted in the Israelite and the Jewish concept of an office. Van Dam (2009:111f) argues that if the two offices of elder and teacher were clearly distinguished in the old dispensation, then one could expect this to be continued in the new dispensation, with a special teaching office in the Christian congregation. When Luke mentioned this office for the first time in Acts 11:30, he did so without any explanation because no one needed it. To the first Christians who were Jewish and had grown up with the synagogue elders, it seemed that the eldership system of overseeing and governing was instituted in each congregation as it was established.

Therefore, continuity with the past was maintained (Van Dam 2009:9). The old concept of an elder becoming a Christian officer indicates its abiding significance. The continuity also shows that the eldership as it now functions in the church cannot be properly understood without the Old Testament background. When the Jewish believers established the first Christian congregations, they considered them not surprisingly, to be new synagogues.

In the Old Testament times, people did not approach God directly. A priest acted as intermediary between God and sinful man. With Christ’s death on the cross, resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father, everything changed. Now

people can come directly into God's presence without fear (Heb 4:16) and are given responsibility of bringing others to Him also (2 Cor 5:18-21). The members of the church are prophets, priests and kings under Christ, so that appointed leaders should be attentive to listen to what members hear from God, as the church together seeks to discern God's will to do it. Peter in 1 Peter 2:9 says:

Nevertheless, you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and His own special people that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Pet2:9).

According to Rensburg (2009:443) the relevant New Testament Greek words for the meanings that are regarded as important in a *bibliological* study of the service of the "elder" are Greek: *episcopos*- shepherd or overseer, *prosmainoi* - care as shepherd (to have the ministerial responsibility) and etymologically related word *presbuteros*-elder, (1 Pet 5:1-3, Act 1:20, 20:28, 1 Tim 3:1). God gives certain persons as gifts to the congregation as shepherd and minister. The shepherds guard the flock, for the congregation is the flock of God (Act 20:28). Within the early church, an elder was a person with the responsibility to rule with regard to religious–ethical matters and had to provide guidance. An elder had to lead and help the congregation that was entrusted to him like a shepherd to his flock (Rensburg 2009:443ff).

The basic meaning of *presbuteroi* are "elders" with the emphasis on the "ripeness of judgment" rather than just on "age," and gives the translational responsibility as "a group of elders" (Act 22:5, 1 Tim 4:14). In the New Testament, again there was no set pattern for selection and appointment of church officers. Some early church leaders were appointed by God directly and the church was notified of the choice through inspired prophets, for example, in the cases of Paul and Barnabas (Act 13:1-3); possibly Timothy (1 Tim 1:18, 4:14).

In the New Testament Church, anyone who was going to be a leader in the church ought to demonstrate maturity in exercising the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). Office-bearers are servants who primarily receive their mandate from Christ to maintain order (Vorster 2011:15). Elders are organs in the hands of Christ used to build up the congregation. They are not dignitaries with an authority based in their higher office, but “first of all believers in the service of Christ - as the first and last authority for the whole church” (Kung 1992:363). The Belgic Confession (Art 27, 28,) expressing the sentiment of order stated that everything would be done well and in good order in the church. The divisions of the church order are:

The offices of the church, the assemblies of the church, the task and activities of the church, and the admonition and discipline of the church. Each of these deals with some aspect of the organizational structure and function of the church (Vorster 2011:14).

Therefore, the New Testament concept of the office of elder can nevertheless be from out of the Jewish synagogue heritage, which in turn has deep Old Testament roots. This office, with which the first Jewish Christians were very familiar, continued in the Christian church under the direction of the apostles.

According to Momberg (2009:458), there is no doubt that from the history of the Reformation, it is evident that there has always been the view that where elders are thoroughly equipped for service- they can equip the government (Act 20:28, Van Dam 2009:103, 135). The Reformed Church polity has widely understood that elders are traditionally responsible for the ministry of the apostles (Smit 2004:191). Where elders are called to supervise all special ministries of the ministry of the Word, supervision and service of relieving poverty, it is a cardinal condition that they could themselves be equipped to do those things. It is then a task in their midst to instate special service

through the ministry of members with special gifts based on the need and the calling of the congregation from their own midst according to the Word of the Lord (Momborg 2009:458).

#### **4.3.2.4 Office of the deacon**

Originally, the call of a *diakonos* was a servant who waited at tables. This principle is never far from the surface when the word and its cognates *diakoneo* and *diakoniai* in the New Testament (Williams 1972:118-119). Wedderburn (2004:44-45f) argues that the point of departure for the *koinonia* concept is the understanding of the church and its mission as rooted in the vision of God's great design (or economy) for all creation: the kingdom which was both promised by and manifested in Jesus Christ. The dynamic history of God in restoring *koinonia* found its irreversible achievement in the incarnation and paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament Church, deacons were appointed to provide relief resources to the vulnerable, viz: the widows, orphans and the sick (Acts 6:1-10, Jas 2:25ff, 5:13-16). At Philippi and in the Asian congregations to which the Pastoral letters were written, there were "overseers" and "deacons" (Phil 1:1, 1 Tim 3:1-13, Tit 1:5-9).

The Apostles urged the church deacons to take the responsibility of caring for the vulnerable and the poor. Janssen (2006:202) argues that: "the deacon enters the world fully- committed to the needs of families and the society. He is completely active in the ultimate goal of all, the social ideal". Therefore, deacons also have their unique ministry and authority in the church, and accordingly are equal to pastors and elders. The office of the deacon centres on help or mercy and righteousness. The noun *koinonia* (communion, participation, fellowship, sharing), derives from the (verb) designation to have something in common, to share, to participate, to have part in or to act together. It

appears in passages recounting the sharing in the Lord's Supper (cf 1 Cor 10:16-17), the reconciliation of Paul with Peter, James and John (Gal 2:7-10), the collection for the poor (Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 8:3-4) and the experience and witnessing of the church (Act 2:42-45).

In the Reformed Church government, the Word of God reveals to us how Christ wishes to minister His authority and government in the churches. For this purpose, He provides gifts and offices and calls people to certain offices of teaching, government and care. There are four ordinary offices in the church namely: ministers of the Word, doctors or professors of theology, elders and deacons (Vorster 2011:15). Through the office of the Word and under the guidance of the Spirit, God gathers His church, and every place where churches have originated, people are elected to serve; ordained to certain offices to equip the believers, build up their faith and preserve the unity of the faith (Du Plooy 1982:108).

In this sense, offices precede the church in principle. Christ never transfers His authority to the office-bearer in the church, but He charges them with the task of ministering Him in and to the church. The office-bearers are nothing more than instruments in the hands of the Holy Spirit (Vorster 2011:15). Office-bearers are servants who primarily receive their mandate from Christ to maintain order. They are organs in the hands of Christ to be used to build up the congregation. Offices are recognized, called, trained and ordained in the local church (Vorster 2011:15). They are not dignitaries with an authority based in their higher office, but first of all believers in the service of Christ as the first and last authority for the whole church (Kung 1992:363). In Reformed Church government, therefore there is no such thing as personal office hierarchy and ecclesiastical influence or power.

#### 4.4 The local church

In the Reformed church government, each local church is an *ecclesia completa* (Smit 2018:6) the assembly of believers (Calvin & Kerr 1989:133). This emphasis is based on the New Testament revelation of the universal and local church. The one universal church finds expression in this dispensation in the local church. The local church is the universal church in a specific place. Christ gives all the necessary gifts in a local church to be church (Smit 2018:6). Members of the local church are those who by confession of faith, by example, and by partaking of the sacraments, profess the same God and Christ with others. The important factor for the local church is the putting into practice its belief and confession in Christ's life, death for salvation and resurrection to eternal life for all people (Mtt 16:16-19, Rom 1:16-17, Rom 10:9-13). The local church's ministry plays a major role in the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son and extends it to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, to bring them infallibly to salvation. Scripture indicates that belief in Christ and the confessions bring great achievements (Mtt 19:26, Mk 11:22).

In the Reformed Church perspective, the focus is on the congregation and the highest authority is the "council of elders" of a local church (cf Smit 2018:6). The fundamental presumption is that the proclamation of the Word precedes the church and edification of believers. The implication is that the proclamation of the Kingdom of God constitutes the church (Smit 2018:4-5). To fulfil the ministry of the Word, Christ gives *charismata* (gifts) in the church. These *charismata* (gifts) become visible in the church as *diakoniam* (Floor 1976 in Smit 2018:5). The priesthood of all believers and the *charismatic* giftedness of

all members also find expression here (Janssen 2006:9). Any particular gift emerges out of the understanding of priesthood of all believers.

Ministers of the Word are *primus inter pares* meaning that they are first elders among the equals. Elders participate in the governance of the regional body of churches called classis by sending delegates to a classis' meeting on a regular basis (Du Plooy 1982:109). The Classis level of the church in *Presbyterial* model, is not a higher authority, but rather is a "delegated" authority; one that only derives its power from the acquiescence of the elders at the local level. In a similar manner, classis sends a selected number of delegates to the broader major body of authority called synod assembly. The synod meets regularly to discuss doctrinal issues and practices facing the whole denomination. Again the synod however does not have a "higher" authority, except in so far as classes and local elders accept its "delegated" authority (Du Plooy 1982:109). The fundamental presumption is that no local church may dominate another, precisely because each is church or ministry of Christ

The Scripture teaches that the various churches assist each other in governing the church of Jesus Christ, decide jointly on difficult matters and serve each other (Du Plooy 1982:108). There can be no "hierarchical relation" between believers and the particular office because God's ministry resides in and among believers themselves (Janssen 2006:9). In Reformed Church government, major assemblies are important and their decisions are binding, provided they are tested against the Word and confession. Yet a major assembly does not constitute a church. This implies that it is not the church that meets, but representatives or delegates of churches (Du Plooy 1982:109).

Under the influence of Collegialism, there is a trend to regard the church government as a great authoritative structure, which is not found in Scripture but in state government (Smit 2018:3). Church government finds its embodiment from the example of state government. In fact, it is possible that the church may even function as a department of the state. Reformed church polity emphasizes that the church is *creatura verbi*, the result of the proclaimed Word (Smit 2018:3). Accordingly, the church is by its nature, a religious community and a community which is unique (*sui generis*) in this world. According to its nature, the church also has a unique form of government. It has been in Reformed tradition ever since Calvin indicated it as a government of the Word, a form of government which claims the heart of the believers and directs life from thereon further (Smit 2018:3-4). In this sense Collegialism may be viewed as the direct opposite of Reformed church polity (Smit 2018:3f).

#### **4.5 The church and state**

The New Testament Scripture indicates that because of the depravity of the human race, God has ordained kings, princes, and civil officers to reign the world (1 Pet 2:17). God wants the world to be governed by laws and policies so that human lawlessness may be restrained and that everything may be conducted in good order (Rom 12:1-2, 8). During the middle Ages, in Europe, the Christian religion determined the position of the state as well as that of the church. Religion gave state authorities and state power their legitimacy, and the government was the protector of the Christian faith (Nieuwenhuis 2012:153-174). Both the church and state are therefore, instituted by God.

In Scotland, the state and church polity was adopted by a contingent of Scottish advisors and Parliamentarians who convened by the Act of the English Parliament “to give guidance to the church” in 1644 (Hall, D. & Hall, J. 1994:9). The General Assembly

of the Scottish Church adopted the Directory of Church government for the sake of practical Presbyterian operation. It included recognition of four offices in the church: pastor in mutual parity with the teacher (doctor), ruling elders, and deacons, all duly called by the church; then too it recognized ascending church courts, provincial, national and ecumenical: the issues of discipline and censure were all later approved by an Act of Parliament in 1647 (Hall, D. & Hall, J. 1994:9f).

Sometimes, in the church and state partnership arrangement, pastors and full-time staff members of the church are treated as employees of the civil government; their salaries are paid, subsidized or paid through a grant by the civil government (Hall, D. & Hall, J. 1994:9f). However, the Presbyterian Church in America did not adhere to sections of the Westminster form of government that deals with the church and state relations as early as 1721, when it denied “the right of the civil government to intrude into church affairs” (Hall, D. & Hall, J. 1994:10f).

The Reformed Church government distinguishes clearly between the task and territory of the church and state, respectively. Both the church and the state are servants of God and, each in its own way serves the kingdom of God (Isa 49:23, Du Plooy 1982:109). Thus, the church has to obey the government, pray for it and, where appropriate, bear testimony towards it. The government, on the other hand, has to create room for the church to fulfil her calling in the world: it should protect the church and assist it in serving the kingdom of God (cf Prov 8:15, 16, Psa 2:10, 12). The separation of the church and state is imperative. Neither the state nor the independent judiciary may act as the last and absolute authority to administer justice in the church (cf Venter 2015 in Smit 2018:9). The legislator may create certain boundaries for the church and other religious organizations, but may not interfere in the internal administration of order and justice in

the churches (Gildenhuis 2001 in Smit 2018:9). For the church, the law of the state should be considered as positive towards the church: the state may protect the church within a self-defined state of secularisation (Smit 2018:9-10). However, each governs its own territory and neither may dominate the other (Du Plooy 1982:109). Separation of the church and state should not be antagonistic (Smit 2013:131-132).

#### **4.5.1 The different views of the church and state**

Doe (2013:361-366), an Anglican Scholar holds that there are a few different views on how the relationship between the church and state could be expressed. In the views of church government, the territories of the church and state are categorised very separately, overlap completely or are dominated by one of the two. The Roman Catholic Church believes that God is the highest, but not only authority; the Pope is *vicarius Christi* (representative of Christ) and that the Roman Catholic Church carries both swords, namely the ecclesiastical as well as the secular (Du Plooy 1982:8).

The Lutheran Church believes in the two-kingdom doctrine: God rules in two ways by means of two regiments; the spiritual kingdom is governed by means of the spiritual regiment; that is the Word and Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not work through laws or institutional agencies (Du Plooy 1982:8f). The secular kingdom: God governs the state and government through secular regiment, namely laws. The church is necessary for the internal reign of God and the state is necessary for the external reign of God. That is the secular regiment; the state receives jurisdiction over the external actions of the church. The juridical acts of the church are, therefore, also the responsibility of the state. In this way, the government of the church is transferred to the secular ruler (Du Plooy 1982:8).

The Episcopalian and Erastian Church government system leaves all the ruling authority in the church and the world in the hands of the state government. The state governs all organised sections of the community and the church as well. This implies that the state government must approve decisions held by the synod of the church. Consequently, the state government determines what is right for the church. It is a statutory system of church government that makes the Word not to have supreme authority (Du Plooy 1982:8f).

The modern trend is that the state government should be completely neutral towards the church. The Charismatic Movements lay one-sided emphasis on the spiritual reality; they are largely neutral towards state government and sometimes even hostile towards natural life and state government (Du Plooy 1982:109).

For Calvin, God governs both the church and the world. God, through His Word and Spirit rules the visible and invisible church. God also rules the world, but maintains a special relationship with the church which He has bought and recreated (Du Plooy 1982:9f). The task of the offices is to serve Christ, as far as Christ is proclaimed whether in the local church or in major assemblies such as a council or synod- this has ecclesiastical authority. The proclamation of authority is not so much a *potestas* as a ministerium. In this sense, the church has the power (*postestas*) to teach, govern and formulate laws in the capacity of a *ministerium*. For Calvin, the authority of the Word is the only authority in the church. God Himself determines what is right through His Word and Spirit, and people are called into offices to proclaim it (Du Plooy 1982:9f).

In Reformed Church government principles, Christ is the only ruler and Head of the church. He has appointed a government distinct from the civil government and in things that are spiritual not physical, and with civil authorities always being subject to the rule

of God. They ought to respect the rights of conscience and of religious belief and to serve Gods'- will of justice and peace for all humanity. The church should therefore exercise no authority over the state or the state over the church. Calvin (1536:1625f) holds that:

He who knows to distinguish between the body and the soul, between the present life and that which is future and eternal, will have no difficulty in understanding that the spiritual kingdom of Christ and civil government are things completely distinct.

#### **4.5.2 The differences between the church and state**

The point of difference between the church and state is that the Kingdom of God is *pneumatologically* determined and not by civil authority. This principle indicates a clear distinction from civil government on the basis that church government is not of the same nature (Postma in Smit 2013:131). The constitutional state protects the church in the self-definition that the church provides. Neither the state nor the independent judiciary has any authority to question or alter the self-definition that it provides (Smit 2018:9). If the church provides a definition based on a secular view of the church, it remains the responsibility of the church to live with the consequences in the church's life, but also for the relationship between the church and the state (Smit 2018:9-10).

The focus for church government is on spiritual dimension, while the state government is responsible for earthly- physical dimension. The church is a religious body that should not depend on the state for its functioning, or for development of both church and state (Smit 2014:131). According to the Belgic Confession on Article 36 on Civil Government says:

We believe that because of the depravity of the human race our good God has ordained Kings, princes, and civil officers. He wants the world to be governed by laws and policies so that human lawlessness may be restrained and that everything may be conducted in good order among human beings. For that purpose, He has placed the sword in the hands of the government, to punish evil people and protect the good. In addition, being called in this manner to contribute to the advancement of a society that is pleasing to God, the civil rulers have the task, subject to God's law, of removing every obstacle to the preaching of the gospel and to every aspect of divine worship. They should do this while refraining from every tendency toward exercising absolute authority. Moreover, while functioning in the sphere entrusted to them, with the means belonging to them. And the government's task is not limited to caring for and watching over the public domain but extends also to upholding the sacred ministry, with a view to removing and destroying all idolatry and false worship of the Antichrist; to promoting the kingdom of Jesus Christ. In addition, to furthering the preaching of the gospel everywhere; to the end that God may be honoured and served by everyone, as He requires in His Word. Nevertheless, everyone regardless of status, condition, or rank, must be subject to the Government. They must pay taxes, hold its representatives in honour and respect, and obey them in all things that are not in conflict with God's Word, praying for them that the Lord may be willing to lead them in all their ways and that we may live a peaceful and quiet life in all piety and decency.

#### **4.6 Chapter summary**

This chapter discussed the Scripture and historical sources to determine basic principles of church government that applied in the New Testament Church. The main question stated for this chapter was: which principles of church government applied in the organisation in the New Testament Church? The aim of this chapter was to investigate from Scripture the principles of church government which applied in the organisation in the New Testament Church in the Reformed Church polity perspective. The scriptural principles of the New Testament Church are pillars on which the

legitimate Presbyterian system of church government rests. To assist in the study, the following structure was used:

- The Kingdom of God.

The point of departure for legitimate church polity is about the Kingdom of God; and how Christ governs the church. The Kingdom of God is not only the objective, but also the central point for the message of the New Testament. The Kingdom of God includes everything on earth even the kingdom of the Caesar. All believers in Christ are unconditionally bound to obey the Word of God and the Confessions through the Holy Spirit.

- Offices.

Christ alone gives the lawful calling, mandate and authority of the office to the church. Offices are gifts, *charismata*, services, aimed at serving Christ in the church. In the tradition of Dordrecht 1618/1619, gifts are those of the ministers, elders, deacons and doctors or professors in theology (CO 2, Smit 2018:5). They are organs in the hands of Christ used to build up the local congregation. There is no such thing as personal office hierarchy and ecclesiastical influence or power.

- Local church.

Each local church is an *ecclesia completa* (Smit 2018:6) the assembly of believers (Calvin & Kerr 1989:133). This emphasis is based on the New Testament revelation of the universal and local church. The one universal church finds expression in this dispensation in the local church. The local church is the universal church in a specific place. Christ gives all the necessary gifts in a local church to be church (Smit 2018:6). The church finds expression by common belief in Christ and the Confessions, proclamation of the Word, rightful

administration of sacraments and discipline. No local church dominates another because each entity is fully and completely the church of Christ.

- The church and state.

The church and state are appointed by God and are servants of God. Each one in its own way serves the kingdom of God: thus the church has to obey the government, pray for it and, where appropriate, bear testimony towards it. The government, on the other hand, has to create room for the church to fulfil its calling in the world, it should protect the church and assist it in serving the kingdom of God. In church and state, each governs its own territory and neither may dominate the other.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter reflected on the Scripture and historical sources to determine principles of church government applied in the New Testament Church. The Kingdom of God is central in the New Testament Church for scriptural revelation. Christ is the supreme Head and Ruler of the Kingdom of God. Christ is the origin and source of all authority. All believers in Christ are unconditionally bound to obey the Word of the King. Christ is the only sovereign Ruler of the church; His Word is the only word that is law in the absolute sense. The Kingdom of God includes everything on earth even the kingdom of Caesar (Smit 2013:133ff).

In the Reformed church polity perspective, each local church is an *ecclesia completa* (Smit 2018:6). The government of Christ is executed by the proclamation of the Word. The government of Christ is fundamentally anti-hierarchical(cf. Smit 2018:3-6f).The local churches recognise one another on the basis of the same Confession as true churches and live in a specific relationship with one another. This relationship does not find

expression in a formalised structure of churches, but in minor and major meetings. These different meetings gather around a specific agenda (Smit 2018:9-19). When the agenda has run its course, the meeting disperses without creating or leaving a formalised structure behind (Smit 2018:9-10).

The New Testament Church holds that God appoints the state government, therefore the church is called to live at peace with the state (Rom 12:1-2, 8). Both the church and the state are servants of God and, each in its own way serves the kingdom of God ((Isa 49:23, Du Plooy 1982:109). Thus, the church has to obey the state government, pray for it and, where appropriate, bear testimony towards it (cf Prov 8:15, 16, Psa 2:10, 12).

However, each authority governs its own territory and neither may dominate the other (Du Plooy 1982:109). The church and state could come close together in the execution of a separate calling and mandate. The gifts in church and politics in state government must all realise something of the principles of the Kingdom of God. They must act towards peace, reconciliation, and justice (Van Wyk in Smit 2013:135f). The governance of the church and the state must be manifested in the quest of believers to conform their ministries and relationships to the teaching of the Word of God (Brand & Norman 2004:4-5). Christ never rules the church by force, but subjectively by His Spirit, which is operative in the church, and objectively by the Word of God as the standard of authority. While specific governing forms of the church offices are contextually shaped, they are not arbitrary. They must be carefully considered in light of biblical foundations and historical developments of Reformed traditional theology (Van Gelder 2000:177-78).

Since the New Testament Church adopted the system of government that drew God's Kingdom's authority from Christ the Head of the church, to the offices of elders,

deacons and courts in obedience to the Word of God through illumination of the Holy Spirit, the contemporary church must take the responsibility to recover this lost system of church government. The system of church government must be based upon the above principles of New Testament Scripture where church polity was formulated according to scriptural principles expressed in different ways depending upon the size of the church, culture and gifted men present.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Ethnic diversity in the contemporary church**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter will discuss how ethnic diversity could be accommodated in the contemporary church from a Reformed Church polity perspective. The question stated for the chapter is as follows: how could ethnic diversity be accommodated in the contemporary church from a Reformed Church polity perspective? The aim of this chapter is to construct an approach that could be applied to overcome ethnicity and accommodate ethnic diversity in the contemporary CCAP based on the experience of the GKSA in South Africa; how ethnically-based structures developed in the church decades prior to 2009 and after 2009, and how the GKSA managed ethnicity and restructure itself to accommodate ethnic diversity?

An important presupposition of this study, which should be considered to understand the reasoning of this chapter, is that the GKSA never was divided in different church communities. Synods were divided on a racial or ethnical basis, but they remained one-church community where the different groups came together within one General Synod.

The GKSA unification process was therefore not aimed at the unification of separate and independent church communities, but rather to manage racial separation and foster unification of the structures of the church community that already existed.

To some extent, there is an important similarity between the GKSA in South Africa and the CCAP Synods in Malawi. The CCAP Synods in Malawi were divided on ethnical basis, but they remained one church community where the different ethnic church groups came together within one General Synod in 1924. In the same understanding the unification of CCAP Synods was not aimed at the merging of separate and independent church communities, but overcoming ethnicity and unifying of the structures of the church community that already existed in Malawi. To assist in this study, the following structure is used:

- Mission work in the early years of the GKSA.
- Theological training in the GKSA.
- Formation of different Synods of the GKSA.
- Unification of different Synods.
- Unitary models for structures of the divided church.

## **5.2 Mission work in the early years of the GKSA**

Without fear of contradiction it may be stated that the GKSA from its origins in 1859 was a church community focused on the importance of the meaning of the catholic nature of the church. From the beginning the GKSA had the intention to manage separation, live and seek communion with churches which are of the same reformed faith (cf. Smit 2009:452). It may be a question whether the GKSA, against this background of an intense ecumenical calling, did enough with regard to the mission of the church since

the institution of the church (Smit 2009: 467, 468). It does not, however, deter the reality that a lot has been done by this church community with regard to the mission of the church. Therefore, from the early years of the GKSA (1859) a missionary responsibility is evident. This is reflected in the attitude of the first minister called in the GKSA, Rev. Dirk Postma. Postma, from the start dedicated some of his time and attention to mission work (cf Fick 2009:522).

### **5.2.1 Early synodal decisions about mission work**

The first synods made positive decisions for the importance of mission work under the influence of Rev. Postma in 1863 (Fick 2009:522). Van Wyk (2016:5-7) holds that the earliest decisions approved by Synods of the GKSA supported the ideas of missions in the church (Synods 1869, cf. 1973). It is a long-established principle of reformed church polity that the local churches (congregation) are responsible for the mission of the church. This also reflects in the decisions of the GKSA. Mission work is a calling for every local congregation (Missionary Church 2018/03/26).

However, Rev. Postma's desire to spread the Word of God met obstacles along the road of mission in the Transvaal (Fick 2009:522). J. J. Venter, an influential deacon and his brother S. D. Venter who happened to be a church minister at Bethule did not share the same idea of missions. They were critical of missionary work. The two Venter brothers argued from out of the doctrine of predestination and election which provided that God chose individuals for eternal life and others for eternal punishment, that therefore Christians could leave it to Him to save those whom He wished.

J. J. Venter's own writings spoke of a "*Piestist buskampf*," view of mission that was based on the missionary work that only shows the fruit of election in the lives of the objects of missionary work. Christians could just do missionary work where the fruits of the election were available (Fick 2009:522). For the Venter brothers, cross-cultural mission was unthinkable, unless there was proof of a change in the other culture (Fick 2009:522). Eventually, the Venter brothers left the GKSA and joined another church, and missionary work continued - uninterrupted in the church.

However, the view in the GKSA was rather that the relationship between mission and predestination rests on a decision of salvation as a hidden decree of God. Because no minister of the Word had insight in who the elect was among his audience, it was not possible to preach the gospel to the unidentified elect only. The mission of the gospel ought to go to everyone (Fick 2009:522). Rev. Postma continued to devote much of his time and attention to mission work (Fick 2009:522). Therefore, the GKSA first synods made positive decisions about missions and Rev. Postma had a strong desire to overcome ethnicity and spread the Word of God amongst black people(cf. Van Wyk 2016:5-6).

### **5.2.2 The first congregations**

From the impact of missionary responsibility, the first congregations were established when Rev. Postma met Venter on June 24, 1859, and decided to buy a pieceland in the district of Vlaktefontein, namely the farm of Michael vander Walt, for £ 1 500 to build a church village. That was the founding of Reddersburg (Fick 2009:531). Winburg also started in 1859 (Spoelstra 1989:73). On January 21, 1860, the Burgersdorp congregation was established on the farm Roosterhoek, and soon the following arose: Colesberg in December 1860, and Middleburg in the Cape Colony- in the Mooirivier

district, Pretoria, along the Crocodile River, Nylstroom, Lydenburg and many others in the Republic of Transvaal (Spoelstra 1989:73). On 21 February 1861, the *Volksraad* officially acknowledged the founding site as a town of Reddersburg and on 2 November 1863, it was declared as such (Malan in Fick 2009:531). The local churches notified the Governor of the Cape Colony of their existence independently without mentioning denominational unity (Spoelstra 1989:73f). Rev. Postma failed to get permission from the church to minister to black people at Nylstroom and he allegedly challenged the church members for practising racism in church circles (Ndou 2000:94-96).

### **5.2.3 Mission work in the Northern Transvaal**

In 1910, South Africa became the Union of SA and the GKSA started mission work among black people with Rev. Pieter Bos focusing on the Northern Transvaal (Ndou 2000:94, cf Du Plooy 2003:490). In order for GKSA missionaries to penetrate the mission areas, it was necessary for them to overcome ethnicity and work with the ethnically-separated people whom they wanted to evangelize (Ndou 2000:94-95). The black churches in the Midlands Synod were born out of the missionary work by the white Potchefstroom churches in South Africa while the churches in the Synod of Soutpansberg were established as a result of missionary activities of the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Baloyi 2010:6-7). Only a few churches were born out of missionary efforts from the Synods of Midlands and Southlands in South Africa.

Eventually, the GKSA planted Mixed/Coloured churches in the Southlands, and Black congregations in Northern Transvaal, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Zambia. Consequently, from the original five congregations with over 300 members in 1859, the GKSA grew to 1 079 confirmed members by the end of 1862. This number rose to 12, 125 in 1904,

and the Almanac of 1941 reported of some 33, 487 members (GKSA Missionary Church 2017/11/11).

#### **5.2.4 Unity in the early years of the GKSA**

In the early years of 1863, unity found further expression in the GKSA among the first five congregations when they adopted the church order (Kerkorde) of the Synod of Dordrecht 1619 as the common basis for a fellowship, cooperation and mutual assistance in ecclesiological matters (Spoelstra 1989:73).

In view of the Reformed Church polity, order is based on the scriptural fact that local churches are a true expression of the church (Du Plooy 1982:108, Smit 2013:137). These local churches recognise one another on the basis of the same confession as true churches and live in a specific relationship with one another. This relationship does not find expression in a formalised structure of churches, but in minor and major meetings. These different meetings gather around a specific agenda (Smit 2018:9-19). When the agenda has run its course, the meeting disperses without creating or leaving a formalised structure behind. Church community is not a matter of formalised church structures, but the expression and experience of the spiritual bond which exists between local churches (Smit 2018:9-10). Major assemblies are not permanent superstructures elevated above minor assemblies, but temporary assemblies of delegates from different churches that assist each other in church government by taking decisions based on Scripture, the church order and the creeds (Monsma 1967:122).

Later in 1923, as mentioned above, due to socio-historical divisions in South Africa, the GKSA wrestled with the concept of ethnic separation to decide on whether black and white congregations within the same ministry could be accommodated into one church

structure (De Klerk in Fick 2009:533). Therefore, unity in the early years of the GKSA was based on inner conviction of the church. Unity was of immense importance for future ecclesiastical and cultural developments of managing ethnic separation in South Africa (cf. Spoelstra 1989:73f).

### **5.3 Theological training in the GKSA**

From the year when the GKSA started in 1859, the need for establishing a Theological School to train ministers grew over the years. In the Reformed view, there was never an office of missionary or evangelist alongside the established office of a minister. Mission is done by a called minister of the Word, sent by a congregation to assemble the body of Christ in an area where no church is yet established. In principle, that is what it was in the origins of the GKSA; any minister can be called by a congregation and sent to all ethnic people as a missionary. In order to illustrate how to overcome ethnicity, Jesus Christ crossed all ethnic and cultural barriers to share the gospel with the Gentiles. The gospel is for everyone without restriction based on status, gender, race and ethnicity (cf. Mtt 28:19-20, Jn 4:1-26, Lk 7:1-10, Mk 5:1-34ff).

#### **5.3.1 Establishment of the Burgersdorp Theological School**

In 1869, the GKSA Synod decided to establish its own theological training school in Burgersdorp, on more or less the model of the Free University of Amsterdam, established by Abraham Kuyper (Van Wyk 2016:2). The GKSA founded this Theological School for theological studies as well as teacher training in Burgersdorp in the Eastern Cape. Rev. Postma and Rev. Jan Lion-Cachet took charge of the training of students during the early years in conjunction with their ministry in the Burgersdorp congregation (Van Wyk 2016:2).

In 1905, the Theological School of the GKSA re-located to Potchefstroom, *inter alia*, to escape the influence of the British-orientated Cape Province (Van der Vyver in Van Wyk 2016:2). As implementation of the ideal of the GKSA to establish an institution for Christian Higher Education, it later became Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (PU-CHE) developed on the model of the Free University of Amsterdam (Baloyi 2010:3f). One of the most influential men in the history, not only of the GKSA, but also of the Afrikaner people and the GKSA, was Professor Dr. J. D. Du Toit (1877-1953), better known by his nickname "Totius". Totius, who was very much influenced and moulded by Kuyper, was the first Afrikaner to receive his doctorate at the Free University, on the topic of *Het Methodisme* (Baloyi 2010:3f). He was to become the embodiment of the Doppe reformd faith and culture in South Africa in the twentieth century. Professor Du Toit would become a leading theologian and poet, who would help translate the Bible in Afrikaans in 1933, together with the rhymed Psalm book in Afrikaans in 1936 (Baloyi 2010:3f).

### **5.3.2 Establishment of different Theological Schools**

The GKSA's first phase of theological training in the black churches began in 1910. The GKSA started to contemplate and develop theological training for the mission churches. Theological training in the black congregations was necessitated by the white missionaries' need for assistance from the indigenous people in the transmission of the gospel, as well as church-planting efforts (Ramantswana 2015:2-4). Jojakim Matlakala was the first black candidate to start receiving training for the ministry of the Word in accordance with the study program approved by the GKSA synod deputies. After a year –and- a- half of studies, he completed his training (Ramantswana 2015:3-4). In June 1947, the GKSA Synod mission deputies examined him, and he was considered worthy

to be called as a minister of the Word. On 8 October 1947, Matlakala was ordained as a minister of Soutpansberg Reformed Church, thus becoming the first black minister of the Word in the GKSA (GKSA 1953:13 in Ramantswana 2015:3-4).

In 1959, Hammanskraal Theological training school was instituted for black students, who wanted to study and become ministers. Other Theological schools for black students started at Heidelberg Theological School in Venda. In 1961, the GKSA established a policy for the training of black ministers of the Word, which ushered in a new phase in theological training (Ramantswana 2015:3-4). From the era of 1961 until 1989, the policy of separation was the framework within theological training done in the black communities/synods. This policy of separation was drafted two years prior to the establishment of the three black national synods, which were established in 1963. This policy reflects the apartheid ideology of the time (Ramantswana 2015:3-5).

The ideal situation that was projected in this policy was to have multiple theological schools for the different ethnic groups – thus reflecting the apartheid policy of separate development of that time. The theological schools were at Hammanskraal for Midlands Synod's-black students, Heidelberg for Soutpansberg Synod's-black students and the Potchefstroom Theological School for Potchefstroom Synod's-white students (Ramantswana 2015:5-6). However, four phases were distinguishable in the history of the black GKSA relating to theological training: the first phase was from 1910 to 1951, the second from 1952 to 1960, the third from 1961 to 1989, and the fourth from 1990 to 2015 (Ramantswana (2015:2f). Therefore, the establishment of racially-based theological schools for black, coloured and white churches came against the background of the socio-political situation of the time in South Africa (Ramantswana 2015:2-3).

### **5.3.3 Unification of Theological training**

In 1994, after socio-political changes in South Africa, an effort for managing ethnic separation and structural unification of theological training to accommodate ethnic diversity began. In the period of 1994/95, the GKSA moved towards unity of black and white churches with regard to theological training. The former Theological schools that were poised to be phased out included Hammanskraal Theological School and Heidelberg Theological School, earlier in 1994. This meant that, for the first time in the history of the GKSA, black and white people would come to receive their training in one and the same institution, at the Potchefstroom Theological School (Ramantswana 2015:6f).

In 1995, the GKSA National Synods met and agreed to deal with ethnic separation and unite three theological schools of Hammanskraal, Heidelberg and Potchefstroom into one Theological School, where students from all sections of the population were to be trained. Consequently, the unification of Theological Schools positively paid off in the sense that for the first time black students started to conduct worship services in White congregations in Potchefstroom and surrounding towns (Ramantswana 2015:4f).

The black students who graduated from the united Potchefstroom Theological School in conjunction with the Faculty of Theology, North- West University, earned Bachelors and Masters Degrees and proceeded to advance their studies to the Doctoral Degree level. Some of the first students who did Doctoral studies were Professors Derrick Mashau (2003) and Rantsoa Letsosa (2006). They were later called to the position of lectureship to teach students at the Faculty of Theology (Ramantswana 2015:6f, 2006, 2009, GKSA Synod Theological training reports).

## **5.4 The formation of different synods of the GKSA**

### **5.4.1 The National Synods**

Because of the establishment of the GKSA missionary work in the Northern Transvaal in 1921 as stated earlier, strong congregations developed among the black population that eventually formed two National Synods: Midlands and Soutpansberg for Black churches. Van Wyk 2016:5) argues that the GKSA was one of the initiators of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES) in 1946 and this Synod was to play a very important role in the ecumenical affairs of the church. Later in 1963, the culturally-based structures in the GKSA culminated in the establishment of four national Synods namely: the Potchefstroom for the white congregations, Southlands for the Coloured/mixed race congregations, Midlands and the Soutpansberg for black congregations (Ramantswana 2015:2f).

### **5.4.2 The political developments in the era 1948**

Following socio-historical divisions of the South African society over the decades, the National Party (NP) of Dr D. F Malan came into power in 1948 and started to provide clear legal distinctions- not just between Black, Coloured, Indian and White, but also within the African society (Beinart & Dubow 1995:16-17f). The South African Government created homelands and their own chieftaincies in order to implement the policy of apartheid. This apartheid policy influenced some churches including scholars from within the GKSA to provide theological legitimation of a legislation that maintained minority rule of the National Party (cf. Villa- Vicencio 1988:23).

Coertzen (2013:33) argues that one cannot say that there was no tolerance of different faith convictions in the country, but all along, the state government was controlling the churches through its policies. While the original motivation for apartheid came from scholars within the GKSA, the GKSA never accepted apartheid as the policy of the church (cf Van Wyk 2016:7-8). From the era of 1948, the South African Government enforced the policy of apartheid on the whole of the country including the churches in South Africa (Coertzen 2013:33).

#### **5.4.3 The necessity of different synods**

Van Wyk (2016:5-9) holds that the church model that developed in the GKSA, could be described not as a *volkskerk*, but as a *volkerekerk* and was formulated by Prof W.J. Snyman (Van Wyk 1985, 1993:45-48) in the 1950s to 1960s in the 20th century. The *volkskerk* is the concept of a “national or people’s” church. It implies that the church of Christ could manifest itself in one’s culture (*volk*) to the point of national synods (Van Wyk 2016:5-9). The reality of differences in cultural values, language and lifestyle always persist in the church of Christ. The churches in the *volkskerk* concept could be composed of separate cultures and function beside one another, but remain one church.

The model followed in the GKSA may rather be indicated as a “volkerekerke”-model. The different cultural-based National Synods could unite together in one major assembly, a General Synod. The important questions of doctrine, the Confessions, church polity and liturgy could be addressed together at a meeting in a major assembly such as the General Assembly. The General Synod of the GKSA, consisting of one ‘white’, one ‘brown’ and two ‘black’ national synods, was first established in 1963 (Van Wyk 2016:5-9ff).

In the context of South Africa's stressful socio-political situation of the 1960s, it was not a minor event for the black and white churches to meet together in one General Synod with whites by far in the minority (Van Wyk 2016:5-9). This was a significant promising development for church unity in the GKSA, soon, however, it met with criticism from the 'younger black churches' claiming that church unity should not start at the 'top' (synodal) level, but from 'below' in the local congregations, they argued (Van Wyk 2016:5-9). The *volkerekerk* model does not differ that much from the *volkskerk* model, for it put too much emphasis on the *volkculture* of the people. The black churches argued that "what we need is not a *volkskerk* model, but a *Godskerk*- "God's people" church model. The result of this criticism was that the General Synod of the GKSA existed only until 1992 (Van Wyk 2016:5-9). Therefore, this major assembly for General Synod of the four National Synods was only functional during the apartheid era, meeting six times (1965, 1975, 1980, 1984, 1988 and 1992); since it was non-functional, it was discontinued in 1992 (Ramantswana 2015:2f).

## **5.5 Unification of the different synods of the GKSA**

### **5.5.1 Unification based on a paradigm shift**

The unification of different synods began as a new paradigm shift after the abolition of apartheid in South Africa in 1990. The socio-political changes re-kindled a fresh theological paradigm shift to eliminate ethnic separation and redefine the church. In 1991, the GKSA accepted the following important recommendation on race-relations taken by the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES): "the ideology of apartheid is a sin and the theological justification of it is a heresy" (Acta GKSA 1991 in Van Wyk 2016:5-6).

In 1994, South Africa held the first multi-party General Elections which led to the adoption of the new Constitution in 1996. This paradigm shift, on the one hand, was a

restorative process of the already existing structures in the GKSA in which the previously suppressed and separated church-structures were regaining their self-confidence to do things on their own, and, on the other hand, felt the need for de-segregation and unification of different Synods (Ramantswana 2015:12f).

In 1998, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the General Synod jointly made a resolution in which it stated unequivocally that it rejected apartheid as wrong and sinful, not simply in its effects and operations, but also in its fundamental nature (Handelinge Algemene Sinode, 1998:509). Therefore, in the period 1991 to 2000, following socio-political changes in South Africa, the GKSA again gave special attention to issues of ethnicity, language and culture in an effort to achieve ecclesiastical unity in the church (2012 GKSA CO 48 art 19, 37, 91, 249, 261). In order to illustrate how to best overcome ethnicity, the Scripture indicates that Abraham was called to be God's agent for His mission to the rest of the people (Gen 12, 15, 17). Christ longs to overcome ethnicity and redeem all ethnic groups so that He could use them to fulfil His mission of salvation (cf. Sule-sea 2000:32-33, Mtt 28:16ff, Mk 16:15-12, Act 1:8).

### **5.5.2 Unification based on common belief in Christ and the Confessions**

The unification of different synods was based on a common belief in Christ and the Confessions. The GKSA enjoyed long-standing "spiritual unity" and had no reason to remain divided structurally, unless it was because of differences based on purity of doctrine and the Confessions. Belief in Christ therefore constituted the church. Order ought to be an essential part of the well-being of the church and the basic principles for order were founded in the Bible and the Confessions. Unity in faith and confession (unity in service, doctrine and discipline) is the only determinant- neither ethnicity nor

political convictions nor joint statements (2012 Synod GKSA CO 48). The church order contained the principles for the maintenance of the God-given order and justice, as well as proposed practical applications of those principles (Vorster 2011:14-15).

The authority of Christ was vested in the preaching of the Word of God through the illumination of the Holy Spirit (Du Plooy 1982:107). Those who serve and exercise authority in the church do so only in Christ's name and according to His Word (Borgodorff 2008:18). The Lordship of Christ means that Christ alone is the Head of the Kingdom of God, the church and He rules through gifted church officers (Clowney 1995:202). The Kingdom of God includes all forms of authority and governance, and the differences in the government of different institutions are all under the authority of Christ given to Him in heaven and on earth (Smit 2013: 135f, Mtt 28:18). The only basis for being one church was in many instances re-discovered by virtue of being committed to serve the same Lord in the invisible church of which Christ is the Head, even of those with whom they had no actual contact or interaction (Erickson 1998:1141).

### **5.5.3 Unification based on integration of structures**

The unification of different synods was based on the merging and integration of minor and major structures of the GKSA. In 2000, the GKSA Synod (Acta: 498) reported that there was an agreement (1997 Acta: 869) among the Synods of Potchefstroom and the Midlands to establish discussions that would lead the church to structural unity.

From 2003 to 2009, the GKSA Synod continued a discussion on "structural unification" for the three former National Synods of Potchefstroom, Midlands and Southlands to be phased out and to integrate them into one major assembly structure namely the General Synod to accommodate ethnic diversity (2012 GKSA CO 48 page 284, Baloyi 2010:1).

An AdHoc Commission (AC) was appointed to provide a preliminary suggestion to the next General Synod regarding the grouping of new minority assembly structures such as Classis and on the manner in which Classis could delegate to the Regional Synod assembly structures, and in turn the Regional Synod structures to the major assembly structure of the General Synod (Acta: 473 & 728, 2006 Acta: 387, 2012 GKSA CO 48 pages 273-274).

Each new minor assembly such as a Classis and regional Synod had to take its own measures with regard to language or medium of communication within the framework of the official languages of the region in South Africa. The respective minor assembly could ensure that language differences could not lead to inadequate communication in the church. Commitment to serve one another in common doctrine, the Confessions and lifestyle was required from the membership (cf Coertzen 2003:332-343).

As a rule, no less than 15 churches formed a classis. There were more or less 410 churches that had to be grouped into Classes. Classes were made up of more churches, so that there could be adequate spiritual gifts to effectively deal with the agenda as far as ethnic diversity was concerned. Attention was to be paid to practical concerns such as distance and cost, as well as the availability of the necessary gifts (cf. Synod GKSA 1997, Acta 1997:865 & 2000, Acta: 501, 2009, 2012 CO 48 art 48).

#### **5.5.4 Challenges to the unification of different synods**

Van Wyk (2016:5f) holds that some of the challenges to overcome ethnic separation and structural unification came as the result of the unfortunate attitude of the Synod of

Soutpansberg who decided not to join, although a few of the Venda congregations did join. The Synod of Soutpansberg expressed controversial demands which indicated disapproval of church unity. Earlier in 1988 (Acta: 53; Acta 1991:508) up to 2006 (Acta: 387) and in 2009 (Acta: 350), there were many reports indicating reluctance of the Synod of Soutpansberg to participate in church unity discussions. The black Classis of Tshwane also did not join (cf GKSA Synod 2006, Acta: 387, 2009, Acta: 350). The aim of this section is to indicate that the process of unification in the church encounters stressful controversy due to differences in participants' understanding of premises and approaches to manage ethnicity and church unity.

#### **5.5.4.1 Differences in understanding of premises and approaches to church unity**

Differences in understanding of the premises of the Bible, the Church Order and approaches in which the process of unification would be done in the GKSA were some of the factors that led to poor progress in church unity (cf position paper written by the Deputies of the Synod of Soutpansberg 01/03/2011:305, 306). The controversial demands expressed by the Synod of Soutpansberg could be traced back from the South Africa's socio-political context when it was established as a result of missionary activities of Rev. Pieter Bos who favoured to work with Black people in Northern Transvaal (Limpopo) in 1910 under the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Ndou 2000:94-95, Baloyi 2010:6-7).

The relationship between the Synods of Soutpansberg and Potchefstroom was strained over-time because of their different stances towards apartheid inside and outside the church (position-paper written by the Deputies of the Synod of Soutpansberg

01/03/2011:302). The Synods of Soutpansberg expressed demands which indicated disapproval of church unity. They argued that the demands needed to be resolved first before discussions on structural unity could proceed (cf GKSA Synod 2006, Acta: 387, 2009, Acta: 350).

#### **5.5.4.2 The Synod of Soutpansberg and its controversial demands**

According to the 2012 GKSA report on CO 48 (art 37, 91, 249, 261, 284 pages 268-269), the Synod of Soutpansberg criticized the decision of the General Synod by alleging that the conditional requirements for merging set by them in 2005 had not been addressed. The Synod of Soutpansberg expected the GKSA Synod to decide in 2012 to declare the earlier decision to merge with the Synod Midlands null and void and to receive a fresh mandate to re-enter into negotiations with the Synod of Soutpansberg right from the start. Only when they were satisfied that all their terms of the demands had been met could there possibly be any question of merging, probably after 2015 (2012 GKSA CO 48 pages 268-269f).

According to the position- paper written by Deputies of Synod of Soutpansberg on 1 March 2011, (pages 302-306, 2012 GKSA CO 48), some of the controversial demands raised, included the following: discussion on the alleged racism and paternalism which were deep-seated in society. The allegation was that the post-2009 Potchefstroom major assembly structures would ensure the entrenchment of paternalism in which “our white churches” would dominate over “our black churches” (the Deputies of the Synod of Soutpansberg 01/03/2011:302).

On sharing of poverty and riches, the Soutpansberg Synod alleged that there was great inequality among the churches. There was need to discuss how churches would share poverty and riches. There was a need to develop a position on this matter to facilitate appropriate resolutions by the two synods. On ethnicity and language diversities, the Synod of Soutpansberg argued that there was a need to develop a position on this matter to facilitate appropriate resolutions by the two synods. The resulting position should then have an impact on how “we structure our major assemblies” (position-paper written by the Deputies of the Synod of Soutpansberg 01/03/2011:302).

On a guiding vision for the countries in which the GKSA ministers, the Synod of Soutpansberg asserted that what was needed was not a political statement or policies, but a position indicating what they considered to be the guiding values aspired by the country in which we minister. There was need to develop such a common position so that it would also in turn have an impact on how we transform the church’s major assemblies. Having such a general common position would enhance public testimony of the GKSA (position-paper written by the Deputies of the Synod of Soutpansberg 01/03/2011:303).

On Theological training, the Synod of Soutpansberg had re-established the Heidelberg Theological Seminary of 2002, when it finally became clear that the Potchefstroom Synod was then not ready for co-ownership with their Theological Seminary, namely the Potchefstroom Theological School. The way forward to arrive at a solution was again to face the issues and develop a common proposal that the two synods needed to agree on and then to take the resulting positions into consideration in the process of

restructuring the major assemblies (position- paper written by the Deputies of the Synod of Soutpansberg 01/03/2011:303).

The Synod of Soutpansberg re-stated the position articulated in 2005 that it was logical to expect of the Soutpansberg churches to give up their seminary in the absence of clear decisions that addressed issues that were raised. The synods might have to find a plan for the Heidelberg Theological Seminary to continue as one of the seminaries of all the churches and to have clear plans for sustaining all the institutions. The Heidelberg Theological Seminary could not continue to exist if the Soutpansberg Synod simply decided to disband its structures (position- paper written by the Deputies of the Synod of Soutpansberg 01/03/2011:303).

On financial church assessments and major assembly structures, the Synod of Soutpansberg held that there had to be a position regarding the financial assessments. There ought to be a correlation between finances to support major assemblies and their institutions. In addition, there ought to be need for discussion on this matter and prepositions to the two synods so that their decisions would then have an impact on the restructuring process (position-paper written by the Deputies of the Synod of Soutpansberg 01/03/2011:303).

In brief, other controversial conditions on the part of Synod of Soutpansberg included the missions, church planting and worship to inform the process of overcoming ethnic separation and restructuring major assemblies regarding: - the issue of ecumenicity which had to be considered so that each synod would be allowed to have its own ecumenical ties; the alleged decision on women in office in 2005 that the Potchefstroom

Synod had taken without consulting Soutpansberg Synod might have implications for church assemblies when ordained sisters were delegated to major assemblies (position-paper written by the Deputies of the Synod of Soutpansberg 01/03/2011:304).

The last conditional demand was to have an agreement on the need for protocol and non-interference in church matters of discipline. In fact, in one case, in Atteridgeville, there were church art. 48 Deputies of the Potchefstroom Synod that were promoting disorder and disunity (paper written by the Deputies of the Synod of Soutpansberg 01/03/2011:305). The Synod of Soutpansberg therefore argued that the church needed to have some agreement on how to deal with such decisions and then to proceed with the outcome in the restructuring process. The position of the Soutpansberg Synod as reported in the 2006 Synod, was to have an intensive program of discussions between 2012 and 2015 so that the two synods could possibly be in a position to establish new major assembly structures in case the process was successful (position-paper written by the Deputies of the Synod of Soutpansberg 01/03/2011:305, 306).

#### **5.5.4.3 Response from the GKSA to the controversial demands**

According to the 2012 GKSA Synod report of Deputies on Church Order 48 (art 37, 91, 249, page 268ff), the GKSA, first held that the position-paper written by the Deputies of the Synod of Soutpansberg, wrongly referred to the General Synod as Synod Potchefstroom. This was a factually incorrect statement. The Acts of Synods of the GKSA from 2000 to 2009 (the first newly structured General Synod), declared that the Acts of Synod Midlands of 26 and 27 August 1997 had already stated the desire “to

form only a geographically structured unity of the one and same church of Christ". The meeting of Synod Midlands decided that:

All Classes initiate discussions with neighbouring Classes of other Synods in their geographical area with the aim of possible mergers".

The decisions of Synod Midlands were taken further in August 2008 (art 21) and made it clear that the churches in both Synods were cooperating (art 48 CO) in creating a new dispensation where all the local churches organised themselves geographically into new Classes, regional Synods and the General Synod(cf. GKSA2006, 2009:Acta 350-360). There was no question of incorporation, but of the merging or restructuring of all the churches in new major assemblies according to the principles of the Church Order (cf 2012 GKSA CO 48, art 37, 91, 249, pages 268-273).

The Synod of Soutpansberg's point of departure was extremely problematical and contrary to biblical reformed church government. The premise and controversial conditions explained in point 2 of the document imply that the Synod of Soutpansberg believed the churches in the GKSA General Synod did not have the marks of the true church and that they are therefore not one with the GKSA in doctrine and church government. The GKSA therefore argued that there is no Reformed church in the world which adopts or has adopted the course in ecclesiastical matters now as proposed by the Synod of Soutpansberg. The approach of unification which Synod of Soutpansberg wished to adopt was therefore alien to article 30 of the Church Order: ecclesiastical matters in an ecclesiastical manner (2012 GKSA CO 48, art 37, 91, 249, 261, 284 pages 268-273).

In 2009, the GKSA Synod reported that the Synod of Soutpansberg had not accepted any of the invitations of the Deputies of the GKSA (art 48 CO) to continue with the

discussions, nor had they attended any of the meetings. Although Synod of Soutpansberg had set the same kind of conditions in the period 2003 to 2006 which had to be met first before there could be any question of restructuring. The Synods of that period (2003-2006) had instructed its Deputies to continue with the discussions so as to determine whether the Synod of Soutpansberg would not agree to cooperate; in other words, to discuss the views/premises of Synod of Soutpansberg. The Synod of the GKSA held at Potchefstroom endorsed the views of the Deputies of GKSA, namely that the problems of the Synod of Soutpansberg could be dealt with soon after the new structures had come into operation (GKSA Acta 2006:389).

In the discussions on 3 June 2010, it once again became clear that the Deputies of the Synod of Soutpansberg were on no account prepared to discuss the views/decisions of the General Synods of 2006 and 2009, nor would they retract their set controversial conditions (GKSA 2005; 2006:389). According to 2012 GKSA Synod reports CO 48, art 37, 91, 249, 261, 284 addendum 2a & 2 b pages 280-290), the GKSA responded to points 1-10 of the position paper written by the Deputies of Synod of Soutpansberg with consideration of and in view of GKSA own premises as follows:

The Synod of Soutpansberg believed that the Synods of the GKSA were racist and paternalistic and that the new structural dispensation implies a “domination” of white over black churches. However, the GKSA argued that the onus rested with them to provide the necessary evidence for such allegations in a biblical way. The General Synod (2009 Acta: 359) made an important decision about the accommodation of diversity in the fellowship of churches (for instance, different peoples and languages in the RSA). The Deputies for matters of church polity were instructed to “study how the

unity and welfare of the churches could best be served in the new structural arrangements” and “how greater participation and involvement of all the churches could be achieved within the context of diversity”. Therefore, the GKSA strongly argued that churches which are paternalistic and racist would not take such sacrificial decisions (2012 GKSA CO 48 art 37, 91, 249, 261, 284 pages 284-286).

On the sharing of poverty and wealth, the GKSA held that churches deal with poverty and wealth in terms of the provisions of the Bible, the Church Order and the forms especially with regard to the office of the deacons in an ecclesiastical manner, and not by means of political statements in the way it is done in Liberation Theology. The approach of structuring major assemblies was not determined by such aspects as wealth and poverty, but by geographical criteria (art 41 CO). The needs of church members and congregations were effectively, lovingly and concretely tackled and addressed by applying the relevant articles of the Church Order, since Scripture urges the church to do so (2012 GKSA CO 48 art 37, 91, 249, 261, 284).

On ethnicity and language, the GKSA held that the previous three Synods held discussions about the matter through the Deputies article 48 of the Church Order. In 2000, the Synod GKSA (Acta: 498) reported that there was agreement (1997, Acta: 865, 869) among Potchefstroom, Midlands and Soutpansberg that churches of the three Synods should assemble in Regional Classes, Regional Synods and a General Synod. It was also agreed that language and cultural factors could be taken into consideration in all ecclesiastical assemblies. It was obvious therefore, that the GKSA Synods decided also in view of the insistence of the Synod of Soutpansberg and Midlands that ethnicity should not carry much weight in the structuring of major assemblies, but that

geographical distance should rather be considered (GKSA, Acta 1997:865, and 2000:501, GKSA 2003 Acta: 473 & 728, 2006 Acta: 387).

On theological training, the GKSA argued that fundamentally, theological training was the joint responsibility of all the churches in a major assembly, such as a General Synod. "Co-ownership" in the sense of ownership of two or three National Synods, was therefore an irrelevant term. The principle was that theological training must in all respects, fundamentally and practically, fulfil the relevant requirements in order to produce fully and suitably equipped ministers for the churches (2012 GKSA CO 48 art 37, 91, 249, 261, 284 page 286). This was something on which the GKSA had focused since 1991 and subsequently (GKSA, Nas Sinode, Acta: 532, 2.4.13; 533, 2; Acta 2003:728; 2006:390). The point of view of the GKSA, as explicitly conveyed to Synod of Soutpansberg, was that the General Synod could attend to that matter. An in-depth study was made by a sub-commission (Prof TC Rabali & Fika J van Rensburg, Acta 2006:390, and 2012 GKSA CO 48 art 37, 91, 249, 261, and 284 pages 286).

In fact, there was actual evidence that certain brothers of the Synod of Soutpansberg had made strong negative statements about the Theological School of Potchefstroom and the Faculty of Theology of the North-West University. One example occurred in 1999 when Dr Rabali said in a lecture in Sibasa, where Dutch Reformed Missionaries were present that the Theological School of Potchefstroom had no credibility in the new South Africa because white Reformed Churches refused to make a confession of guilt about apartheid and had made no restitution (Addendum 3, 2012 GKSA CO 48 art 37, 91, 249, 261, 284 page 286f).

On the financial church assessments and major assembly structures, the GKSA held that the Soutpansberg Synod did not provide substantiation and evidence. In the GKSA document; on the other hand, the church proved that the Synod of Soutpansberg had agreed to Regional Synods, whereas it was alleged (without reference) that the Synod of Soutpansberg had proposed that Regional Synods could not form part of a new structure because of financial reasons (2012 GKSA CO 48 art 37, 91, 249, 261, 284 page 286f).

Again in brief, on the points 7 to 10 conditions the GKSA held that it found no valid reason for the argument with regard to missions, church planting and worship. No reference was made to any decisions of the GKSA which would lead to problems with the GKSA's point of view and decisions in this regard. On the alleged contradictory decision by the two synods on women in the office of deacon, the GKSA held that the decision could be identified by the respective ecclesiastical assemblies and dealt with in an ordinary ecclesiastical manner according to the Church Order so that matters could be rectified and brought to order, if necessary. The GKSA argued that in the period 2003 to 2006, the art 48 Deputies, in conjunction with the Deputies of Midlands and Synod of Soutpansberg, examined this matter, and reported on it to Synod 2006 (Acta:389-390, 2012 GKSA CO 48 art 37, 91, 249, 261, 284 pages 285-287).

Although the GKSA (Synod 2006) made decisions on the matter of structural unification and had taken note of the Synod of Soutpansberg's view that they wished to solve the matter first before new structural arrangement, the Synod decided (GKSA 2006, Acta: 391) to continue with the dialogue with the Synod of Soutpansberg on this matter and other problems experienced by the latter.

In this period 2006 to 2009, the Synod of Soutpansberg had accepted none of the invitations to enter into discussions with the GKSA Deputies CO, art 48 and those of Synod Midlands (GKSA Synod Acta 2009:350-360). In 2009 (Acta: 357) it was noted that the Synod of Soutpansberg had not attended any meetings of the art 48 Deputies with the Deputies of the other two Synods, since they were not prepared to abandon their views. The Synod of Soutpansberg did not, however, make use of the opportunity to explain to the GKSA why they believed the decision referred to above (2006 Acta: 389-390) was incorrect. They could have used the opportunity before 2009, if they had accepted the invitations for dialogue, and even subsequently, to provide reasons why they thought the decisions were incorrect (2012 GKSA CO 48 art 37, 91, 249, 261, 284). However, the GKSA argued that it was a known fact that churches were misled through half-truths and incorrect facts about the entire process of unification which could have culminated in the restructuring all assemblies of the church(2012 GKSA CO 48 art 37, 91, 249, 261, 284 pages 272f).

In an effort to persuade churches to be engaged in a discussion between the Deputies of Classis Tshwane and Deputies art 48 of the GKSA on 31 August 2009 in Brooklyn, Pretoria (addendum 6), and dispel false perceptions and views about the reasons for the process of unification and the decisions of Synods Midlands and GKSA Potchefstroom (especially in the period 2000 to 2006), the GKSA explained the official position of the church to the Tshwane Deputies (*inter alia* to Rev. J. Lekalakala) with substantiation from the official Acta and minutes of these major assemblies. In opposition to these legitimate efforts for structural unification, an organised project by the Synod of Soutpansberg took its course to persuade churches not to keep decisions

of Midlands and the General Synod of 2009(2012 GKSA CO 48 art 37, 91, 249, 261, 284 pages 272-274).

However, the Synods of Potchefstroom and Midlands insisted on continuing with discussions and restructuring major assembly structures. The Acta of the National Synods of 2006 (387-399) and 2009 (350-360) clearly testified that all three Synods were aware of the state of affairs and that the above-mentioned period was the target date. The intention and assignment of the Deputies of the GKSA and Midlands were precisely to reach clarity about the problems of Synod Soutpansberg and to persuade them to cooperate in the uniting process in terms of the Reformed Creed and Church Order (Addendum 2a and 2b). Nevertheless, it proved to be impossible to convince the Synod of Soutpansberg to agree to a normalisation of relations according to the principles of the Bible, the Confessions and Church Order (2012 GKSA CO 48 art 37, 91, 249, 261, 284 pages).

#### **5.5.4.4 Unnecessary and boundless unification delays**

The 2012 GKSA Synod held that the actions and decisions of the Synod of Soutpansberg had caused unnecessary and boundless delays in the process of reaching constructive and effective unity in terms of the ideal that the three former Synods shall meet as one General Synod, including the restructuring of major assemblies (2012 GKSA CO 48 page 272ff). Since 2004, the Synod of Soutpansberg had been engaged, in the terms of a fixed plan and method, to establish their own ethnically- separated fellowship/structure of churches, alongside that of the GKSA (and

the former Synod Midlands), which would function independently of the GKSA (Addendum 2 b. 8, 2012 GKSA CO 48 page 280ff).

The Synod of Soutpansberg was not prepared to cooperate or to give clear reasons why they believed the decisions for structural unity were contrary to their view of the Church Order. The GKSA therefore was forced to conclude by informing the Deputies of the Synod of Soutpansberg on 1 March 2011, that the Synod was constantly delaying the progress of ironing out the problems of restructuring and the constructive restoration of unity for according to them there could at most be consensus after 2015 (2012 GKSA CO art 37, 91, 249, 261,284, pages 269f).

The Synod of Soutpansberg's lack of participation in the discussions since 2006, as well as their document with all the matters they regarded as problematic and which they had set as conditions for cooperation in a new structure, forced the GKSA to conclude that the Soutpansberg Synod was not truly serious about structural unity (2012 GKSA CO 48, art 37, 91, 249, 261, 284 page 289f). Therefore, the GKSA further indicated that point 2 of the position paper of the Deputies of the Synod of Soutpansberg not only identified problem areas, but also contained accusations and charges without any concrete evidence from Synods or major assemblies of the church and the General Synod 2009 (2012 GKSA CO 48, art 37, 91, 249, 261, 284).

## **5.5.4.5 Termination of ties between General Synod and the Soutpansberg Synod**

### **5.5.4.5.1 Reflection on the history of discussions**

After careful consideration of everything, as reflected in the history of discussions over many years and the contents of the reports, the GKSA had to conclude that the bond which existed had been severed by the unilateral conduct of the Synod of Soutpansberg. In fact, the Synod of Soutpansberg had for a considerable time been meeting and functioning more and more independently of the GKSA as a separate fellowship of churches. The GKSA asserted that it was a very sad state of affairs to come to the conclusion that the said Synod of Soutpansberg did not show seriousness with regard to the unity “we all confess according to our reformed creeds” (addendum 11 pages 313, 2012 GKSA CO 48, art 37, 91, 249, 261, 284). The GKSA regretted that the state of progress and further discussions with the Synod of Soutpansberg would be possible only if they could convince the GKSA of their commitment to cooperate diligently in striving for structural unity according to the Reformed principles of church polity (GKSA CO art 5, 2012 GKSA CO 48 art 37 pages 275ff).

### **5.5.4.5.2 Lack of functional and structural unity**

On 7<sup>th</sup> January 2012, the General Synod, wrote a letter to the Deputy of Correspondence of the Synod of Soutpansberg, expressing sorrow at their attitude for lack of functional and structural unity:

We regret with deepest sorrow, that the General Synod of the GKSA, in dealing with a report of the Deputies Article 48 Church Order on 5 January 2012, had to take the following decision: “That

the Synod accepts the reality that Synod Soutpansberg (SPB) does not reflect functional and structural unity”(2012 GKSA CO 48 page 276f).

The GKSA held that there were churches, and in certain cases specific members of churches who as a result of the termination of ties between Synod Soutpansberg and the GKSA, might sometimes require speedy support from other churches (art 30 CO). The support mainly included advice on several terrains. The problems that congregations (and sometimes individual members) in the GKSA experienced due to the termination of ties between the GKSA and Synod Soutpansberg would probably not be solved immediately, but would continue for an indeterminate time. There could be financial costs involved in the support to churches and members. The General Synod would appoint Deputies from experts who could coordinate the support offered to churches that experienced problems after the termination of ties between the GKSA and Soutpansberg and who could, when needed, provide churches with advice; if necessary with advice from the Deputies Legal Matters(2012 GKSA CO 48 art 37, 91, 249, 261 page 274ff).

The GKSA held that the different Classes would be requested to organize special visitation in terms of CO art 44 at congregations that might possibly be affected by the termination of ties with Synod of Soutpansberg. The different Classes could be requested to ask questions related to CO art 41 in the long term with regard to the state of affairs in congregations affected by the relationship with Soutpansberg in order to assess if churches needed assistance for proper management (GKSA CO art 5, 2012 GKSA CO 48 art 37 pages 275ff).

Therefore, the GKSA observed that the attitude and actions of the Synod of Soutpansberg and the facts described in the reports and addenda had convinced the GKSA Deputies that the said Synod was not really committed to overcome ethnic separation and convinced of structural unity in terms of the Bible, Church Order and the Confessions, although it continued to insist that they were. The actions of the Synod of Soutpansberg (including Classis Tshwane), reflected no respect or regard for neighbouring (black) Reformed Churches who functioned in the fellowship of the GKSA. The actions of the Synod of Soutpansberg to intimidate and disrupt other churches left a lot to be desired. This led to mutual and unacceptable tension and disputes among the churches and Classes in the same environment. The GKSA Deputies had therefore to face the reality that a decision had to be made as to whether the ideal and assignment of one new ecclesiastic structure to which the Synod of Soutpansberg belonged, were tenable (2012 GKSA CO 48 art 37, 91, 249, 261, 284).

For this reason, the GKSA had no choice, but to terminate all discussions until the Synod would come to a decision about the issues. This decision of the GKSA was in response to the Synod Soutpansberg's long-standing opposition to reject structural unity. All the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA) were urged to terminate ties with the said Synod and its affiliates (CO art 5, 2012 GKSA CO 48: page 275).

The GKSA further decided that different Classes could be requested to specifically arrange that the consultants of vacant congregations assist the congregations if the implications of the termination of ties with Synod Soutpansberg became relevant. The *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* in the Netherlands (CGKN) and the Christian Reformed Church North America (CGNA) and Canada (CRCNA) would then be informed of the painful decision reached by the Synod with regard to the termination of

ties with the Synod of Soutpansberg (GKSA 2009:359,360, 404, 2012 GKSA CO 48 page 275).

In light of this discussion, the study has established that differences on premises and approaches to overcome ethnicity and unification were the main reasons for the poor progress of structural unity in the GKSA in South Africa. The aim of this section of study was to indicate that the process of structural unification encountered stressful challenges due to participants' differences in premises and approaches on how to manage ethnicity, foster church unity and accommodate ethnic diversity. Differences in understanding the biblical reformed church principles, the Church Order and the approaches in which the process of structural unification would be carried out in the GKSA, as well as church politics expressed in political statements of the position paper written by the Deputies of the Synod of Soutpansberg, were some of the factors that led to poor progress in church unity in the GKSA (cf. the Deputies of the Synod Soutpansberg 01/03/2011:305, 306).

The premise and controversial conditions explained in the document by the Deputies of Synod Soutpansberg (01/03/2011:305, 306ff) implied that the Synod of Soutpansberg believed the churches in the GKSA General Synod did not have the marks of the true church and that they were therefore not one with the GKSA in doctrine, the Confessions and church government. The Synod of Soutpansberg did not always consider the real facts, neither did it refer to concrete decisions and therefore had wrong perceptions of the views and decisions of the GKSA. Testimonies of insights, plans and actions of the Synod of Soutpansberg became obvious alongside individual ministers' attempts to establish - alongside the GKSA, their own ethnically-separated countrywide structure of

churches and major assemblies under the leadership of the Synod of Soutpansberg (2012 GKSA CO 48 art 37, 91, 249, 261, 284 page 288f).

Therefore, the controversy could be summed up to include historical, cultural, and socio-political factors and personal ambitions by certain individuals in the church which might probably be the motivation why there was no possibility of reconciliation (cf GKSA, Acta 1997:865, and 2000:501, cf. 2012 GKSA CO 48 art 37, 91, 249, 261, 284 page 285f). The relationship between the Synods of Soutpansberg and Synod of Potchefstroom had become strained over-time in history due to their different stance towards apartheid, both inside and outside the church (position-paper written by the Deputies of the Synod of Soutpansberg 01/03/2011:302). However, the GKSA decided that the Synod of Soutpansberg is a church community besides the GKSA due to the fact that all Christian members who truly belong to the church are one people committed to the same Reformed Church doctrine, the Confessions and lifestyle (Milne 1982: 215ff).

In the view of the Reformed Church polity, order is based on the scriptural fact that local churches are a true expression of the church (Du Plooy 1982:108, Smit 2013:137). These local churches recognise one another on the basis of the same confession as true churches and live in a specific relationship with one another. This relationship does not find expression in a formalised structure of churches, but in minor and major meetings (Smit 2018:9-19, Monsma 1967:122).

#### **5.5.4.6 The challenge of language in the GKSA**

The challenge of language would need a practical solution. The point is that the GKSA decisions never established a language as the norm, but rather that the best possible standard should be obtained at synod. The synod should then provide for the translation services. The point is not the culture or the language are the norm, but service in the best possible way in the church. Therefore the norm is the best possible standard. The latter is the core of the Synod 2009's decision.

##### **5.5.4.6.1 The use of mother-tongue**

The use of mother-tongue could be a realistic approach to resolve the practical problem of language in mission outreach and church polity. Everybody should in a realistic way be able to express himself in his mother-tongue than if he is not able to use another language.

##### **5.5.4.5.6.2 Translation**

Translation could be another approach to ease the problems of communication between languages of different people depending on need. This approach would help eliminate ethnicity in the church. The aim of the Bible translation in the GKSA was to:

Create an understandable source text oriented Afrikaans translation of the Bible, suitable for reading and use in worship services as well as catechism, Bible study and personal use.

According to 2015 report on Bible Translation (GKSA Art 103 Acta 2015:111, 112, 3.1.5, 3.1.6 pages 268-270), the GKSA Synod nominated individuals for the Advice Committee on Bible Translation at the Bible Society, offer assistance with all matters

related to the *Verdere Afrikaanse Vertaling* of the Bible, continue with the instruction of Synod 2000, about the names of God of *JHWH* and *Adonai* in the Old Testament, and the appointed Deputies to start evaluating the translations that “a well-considered decision may be made about their official use in 2018”. The Deputies were to *inter alia* review the faithfulness of the translation instruction (letter) as well as the specific aspects the GKSA would like to see in such a translation (for example the names of God).

The Deputies were to review the application of the translation guideline in terms of the names of God of *JHWH* and *Adonai* in the Old Testament (Acta 2003:114, 5.3.5 and 6.1.3.4), taking into account existing guidelines for translators. A section of *Die Bybel: 'n Direkte Vertaling* (New Testament and Psalms) was published in 2014, but the remainder of the Old Testament would not be ready for publication before the General Synod 2018 (GKSA Art 103 Acta 2015:111, 112, 3.1.5, 3.1.6 pages 268-270). The Deputies in the GKSA were to evaluate the translation and make a recommendation to enable the General Synod 2021 to come to a well-considered decision on its official use. The Deputies must see to the compliance with the translation guideline, in terms of the names of God *JHWH* and *Adonai* in the Old Testament (Acta 2003:114, 5.3.5 and 6.1.3.4), taking into account existing guidelines for translators (GKSA Art 103 Acta 2015:112, 3.1.5, 3.1.6 pages).

The Deputies in the GKSA were to enable the General Synod 2018 or soon afterwards to judge whether the BDV translation complies with the instruction, namely whether it is as faithful to the source text as possible and rendered in understandable Afrikaans. The relevant source texts are deemed worldwide as the most authentic Bible texts, which is for the Old Testament the fourth edition of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS4) and for

the New Testament the fourth edition of the Greek New Testament (UBS4 rev) of the World of Bible Societies(GKSA Art 103 Acta 2015:112, 3.1.5, 3.1.6 pages 268-270). A possible date was mentioned as DV 2020(GKSA Art 103 Acta 2015:111, 112, 3.1.5, 3.1.6 pages 268-270).

## **5.6 Unitary models for structures of the divided church**

Following the above discussion, this study indicates that it may be possible to establish two different ways or approaches of experiencing church unity on the basis of reformed church polity principles. The aim of the unitary models will be to manage ethnicity and establish that all the elect who belong to the church are truly one in Christ, committed to the same Reformed Church doctrine, the Confessions and lifestyle (cf. Milne 1982: 215). The unitary models to be applied to manage ethnicity and accommodate ethnic diversity for the divided church are namely: the separatist church model and the unification church model.

### **5.6.1 The separatist church model**

#### **5.6.1.1 The GKSA separatist church structures prior to 2009**

The GKSA adopted the separatist church model based on ethnicity several decades before 2009 in South Africa. This system of a separatist church model functioned by identification of every church structure according to South African distinctive society's traditional culture and legal influences. The unity of the church was not primarily of an external dimension, but of an internal and spiritual character. This separatist church model implies that all the people who belong to the church share in the same faith, and are cemented together by the bond of love of God, and have the same glorious outlook in the future (cf. Berkhof 1996:572). The GKSA churches composed of separated-racial

cultures functioned beside each other in different classes and national Synods, but continued to remain one-church community. The four national Synods namely: the Potchefstroom for white congregations, the Southlands for the Coloured/mixed congregations, the Midlands and the Soutpansberg for black congregations, therefore operated separately beside one another, but met together in a one-major assembly (Ramantswana 2015:2ff, cf Villa- Vicencio 1988:23).

The different synods also established separate structures for theological schools to meet the needs of the congregations based on the culture of the people such as the Potchefstroom Theological School for Potchefstroom Synod's white students, the Hammanskraal Theological School for Midlands Synod's black students, and the Heidelberg Theological School for Soutpansberg Synod's black students (Ramantswana 2015:2ff). However, the important questions on doctrine, confessions, church polity and liturgy were resolved together at meetings in a major-church structure, the General Assembly in 1963, 1965, 1975, 1980, 1984, and 1988, but it was discontinued in 1992 (Ramantswana 2015:2f).

## **5.6.2 Unification of church structures model**

### **5.6.2.1 Unification of GKSA Church structures after 2009**

This study indicates that the GKSA adopted unification of church structures after theological re-evaluation in 2009. The unification of church structures aims to overcome ethnicity and merge the GKSA's ethnically-separated church communities into one-church community that already existed in South Africa. The GKSA enjoyed long-standing "spiritual unity" and had no reason to remain divided structurally, unless it was because of differences based on purity of doctrine and the Confessions. Belief in Christ

therefore constituted the church. Order ought to be seen as an essential part of the well-being of the church and the basic principles for order were founded in the Bible and the Confessions (Vorster (2011:14-15).

One of the results of the unification was that the theological training should provide sufficient opportunity for the students to train in practical aspects of the ministry, for example the way in which they could perform sermons. This in general happens in the local churches surrounding the Theological School, where students get the opportunity to exercise their gifts to conduct a sermon. The latter provided the opportunity where those students, irrespective of race, get the opportunity to exercise their gifts. Students are allowed to execute these training exercises, when it is conducted in a traditional white congregation, either in English or Afrikaans. This arrangement was well-accepted in most of the different local churches and continues to this day.

In 2003 and 2006, the GKSA decided to merge different church assembly structures from the different population groups into one-major General Synod assembly without National Synods in order to accommodate ethnic diversity. From a Reformed Church polity perspective, therefore, major assemblies are not permanent superstructures elevated above minor assemblies, but a temporary assembly of delegates from different churches that assist each other in church government by taking decisions based on Scripture, the church order and the creeds (Monsma 1967:122). The local churches, Classes and regional synods could freely merge and communicate, both in their mother-tongues, across languages and cultures and not “rule” over each other in order to attain greater participation and involvement of all churches in the context of ethnic diversity (2006 GKSA Pretoria Art 19, 37, 249, 266).

### **5.6.3 Summarized comparison of GKSA structures prior to 2009 and after**

In summary, it must be clear that prior to 2009, the GKSA was characterized by the ethnic separatist church structures through socio-technical, political regions and culture of the people namely: the Potchefstroom Synod composed of white congregations, the Southlands Synod composed of Mixed/Coloured congregations and the Midlands and the Soutpansberg Synods composed of black congregations in South Africa.

After 2009 theological re-evaluation, the GKSA phased out separation of structures for the synods of the Potchefstroom, the Midlands and the Southlands, eliminated ethnicity and merged the Potchefstroom and the Midlands structures to accommodate ethnic diversity and formed united assemblies in geographical areas and the general synod. The Soutpansberg Synod refused to restructure due to endless differences in the stance towards apartheid, in understanding of the premises of the Bible, the Church Order and differences in the approach in which the process of unification would be done. The Soutpansberg Synod therefore, maintained the status quo, and broke ties with the GKSA General Synod.

### **5.6.4 Unitary models for the divided church in Malawi**

#### **5.6.4.1 The separatist CCAP structures**

The study will analyze how the separatist church model based on ethnicity functions in the CCAP in Malawi. The separatist church model indicates that the church is one-community: separated by socio-technical issues and culture. The unity of the church is not primarily of an external dimension, but of an internal and spiritual character. The CCAP Synods are one-church community; boundaries remain fixed based on ethnicity

and political regions, traditional culture and language of the people from the time of her birth in Malawi in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

In the history of Malawi and the CCAP Synods, ethnicity and ethnic divisions remain a systematically-embedded challenge (Mapala 2016:1-2). The colonial administrators employed a divide-and-rule strategy to serve their interests. In the 1890's the British colonial administrators encouraged competition between ethnic groups and favoured certain ethnic groups that were friendly to them. The underlying factor for the choice of chiefs to be included in indirect rule scheme was the ability to govern a large political area (Mapala 2016:133). The method of evangelization used by the European Church Missionaries for restricting particular dominant ethnic culture, practice and language for easy acceptance was also political (Zeze 2014:167ff). Therefore, the European Missionaries divided the CCAP Synods according to ethnically-restricted areas of the North for Livingstonia, South for Blantyre and Centre for Nkhoma respectively.

In 1924, during the formation of the CCAP General Synod, the Synods of Livingstonia, Blantyre and later in 1926 Nkhoma, settled for an ethnically-federalist system based on inter-regional distrust and culture: the CCAP therefore, also actively contributed to the ethnically-structural division of Malawi (Munyenyembe 2016:5). The arrangement led to an emergency of the endless border dispute along ethnic lines between the Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods from 1956 to this day, with no worthwhile solution (Munyenyembe 2016:5f).

In 1924, the General Synod of the CCAP became the highest ecclesiastical court, although by that time the church had not yet received its autonomy from the Church of Scotland (Weller, J. & Linden, J. 1984:114ff). The CCAP General Synod unanimously resolved that the Livingstonia and Blantyre Synods would remain ethnically- separated; the government for decision-making and missionary enterprise would be in line with the

Presbyterian/Reformed Church polity and traditions of the “mother” church. The General Synod became a federation of the ethnically-separated Presbyterian Churches in Central Africa (Menyenyebe 2016:6, 20). This ethnically-separated structural arrangement made the position of the General Synod in the CCAP unstable over the decades.

Mapala (2016:11) holds that between 1924 and the early 1960s, each presbytery/synod of the CCAP had two ecclesiastical structures, namely, mission and the presbytery. The Synodal mission council, as an institution, was meant to be a body composed of white missionaries, with its administrative committee being the legislative authority. The Synodal council was responsible for controlling missionaries and overseas finances, as well as mission station buildings and its institutions, namely, schools and hospitals funded by overseas finances (Mapala 2016:11). While the Presbytery, though dominated by white missionaries until the early 1960s, was an indigenous body comprising of African indigenous clergy and church elders (Thompson 1975:7). This body was responsible for church discipline for indigenes, as well as the ordination and management of the indigenous church in general. Though there were two structures governing one church, the most powerful structure was the mission council, because it was the ultimate decision-making body for all operations of the indigenous church including the determination of salaries for indigenous clergy and lay employees of the church (Mapala 2016:11).

Additionally, the autocratic government characterised the CCAP under the influence of the European Missionaries and the British Colonial Government in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Zeze 2014:167ff). Other factors for the establishment of the autocratic system in the CCAP were the influence of African traditions and the leadership style of President Dr

Hastings Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Congress Party in Malawi (Mapala 2016:260, 276, 301, cf. Gama 2016/09/23). The influence of the political system of civil government characterized the formation of ethnically-separated structures of the CCAP, Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods (Pass 2007:127, cf. Gama 2016/09/23).

The CCAP Nkhoma Synod was particularly characterised by a symbiotic relationship with Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) that contributed to the fragmentation of the CCAP along ethnic lines (Ross 1996: 85,103, cf Gama 2016/09/23). The ultimate objective of the Nkhoma Synod leadership was to claim the Central Region as its sphere of influence, because it was their missiological approach, coupled with economic and political reasons. The Nkhoma Synod politically, repositioned itself in close association with the Banda regime (Mapala 2016:276, 301, cf. Gama 2016/09/23). The hierarchical system of government also characterized the CCAP, Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi (Ross 1996:66). The church-ministers became exclusive and principal political leaders who behaved like hierarchical rulers under the influence of President Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP, Ross 1996: 85,103, Gama 2016/09/23).

In 1977, when the Zomba Theological College was opened, theological mistrust did not dominate the debates in the CCAP, but it was later exposed as one of the ethnically-divisive legacies that the Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) missionaries had imported (Mapala 2016:205-206). In 1993, the CCAP Nkhoma Synod resolved that after completing a three-year programme at Zomba Theological College, its students were asked to undergo a separate one-year programme at Nkhoma headquarters to perfect their education and ensure that they conformed to NGK tradition (Mapala 2016:205-206ff). Meanwhile, the separate training for church ministers from the Synods of

Livingstonia and Nkhoma at Zomba Theological College enhanced ethnic divisions in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP).

However, the separatist church model based on ethnicity provides no amendment to the Constitution of the CCAP General Synod and maintains the status quo. The approach continues to enjoy the undisturbed communication between the ethnically-separated structures of the CCAP Synods of Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma. This structural model does not challenge the status quo, but continues to operate the CCAP Synods without structural changes. In this separatist church model, there are always endless problems: no relevant solutions could be provided to questions and the same problems erupted repeatedly. Therefore, the CCAP Synods were characterised by systems of government and methods of evangelisation based on separation of structures under the influence of the European Missionaries from Scotland, England and South Africa.

#### **5.6.4.2 Unification of the CCAP structures in Malawi**

The study will analyze how the unification church model will be applied to overcome ethnicity and accommodate ethnic diversity in the CCAP Synods in Malawi. The point of departure in this study will be to again, briefly highlight historical factors that influenced the CCAP Synods in Malawi to adopt the unification of church structure approach in the evangelistic enterprise.

In the early 1890's, the Livingstonia and Blantyre Missions Conference decided to form a one-united church for British Central Africa with the possibility of a United Presbyterian Church (UPC, Weller, J. & Linden, J.1984:114ff). This unification of church structure model held that the CCAP Missions were one-church community, by virtue of being committed to and serving the same Lord in the invisible church, but the CCAP Missions struggled to overcome ethnicity and integrate different ethnically-separated

structures. The objective of the structural unity in the CCAP in that period was for the strengthening of missionary ties in the Christian community of all Presbyterian/Reformed Churches in Central Africa.

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 India (Weller, J. & Linden, J. 1984:114ff). In the following year, further discussions were held during the United Missionary Conference at Mvera Mission in the Nkhoma Presbytery. In 1914, the two “mother” churches: Free Church of Scotland and the Church of Scotland were to give permission and plans for the union of Livingstonia and Blantyre Presbyteries but because of the outbreak of the First World War, all advances for unity were postponed since 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 be instituted then. The Missionary Conference met in September 1924 at Livingstonia and formally constituted the CCAP General Synod and Rev. Dr Robert Laws became its first Moderator (Weller, J. & Linden, J. 1984:114ff).

In 1924, the General Synod of the CCAP became the highest ecclesiastical court, although, by that time, the church had not yet received its autonomy from the Church of Scotland (Weller, J. & Linden, J. 1984:114ff). Mapala (2016:11) holds that between 1924 and the early 1960s, each presbytery/synod of the CCAP had two ecclesiastical structures, namely, mission and the presbytery. In 1945 to 1956, to harmonise the CCAP presbyteries’ constitutions and formulate a single constitution of the church, the Synodal Standing Committee drafted the Constitution of the CCAP with the purpose of

harmonising its structure and operations which was later adopted in 1956 (Mapala 2016:11, 189).

Since 1956, the issue of the ethnic border dispute had been discussed between the two Synods of Livingstonia and Nkhoma, without finding a lasting solution (Mapala 2016:6). There were several attempts to resolve the endless border dispute by partner churches and ecumenical bodies to which CCAP was a member, such as the Church of Scotland, Presbyterian Church in Canada, Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Presbyterian Church in USA, the Dutch Reformed Church, World Council of Reformed Churches and the Southern Africa Alliance of Reformed Churches. These bodies' approaches which aimed at resolving ethnically-based boundary disputes proved futile. In 1990, after the CCAP General Synod and partner churches failed to solve the ethnically-based border dispute, the Synod of Livingstonia passed a "resolution of no-border" between the Nkhoma Synod and itself (Mapala 2016:6).

Regarding the ethnic separation of theological training of ministers, in 1956, in line with the process of harmonisation for the CCAP operations, the Blantyre and Livingstonia Presbyteries proposed to the General Synod that they needed to have a joint Theological College. They also suggested the Nkhoma Theological College or a nearby site to be an appropriate place. The General Synod accepted the idea and referred it to a Synodical Joint Theological College Committee (JTCC) for further discussion. In 1957, the report for the Joint Theological College Committee reads:

The Synod of Livingstonia would reiterate the desirability of a single Theological College for the CCAP. It would be a symbol of the unity of the CCAP Church, and a sign of the independence, enterprise and responsibility of the CCAP in Southern Africa.

On 17 May 1957, the Joint Theological College Committee (JTCC) resolved that the “English Language”, would be the medium of instruction, supplemented by explanations and discussions in the vernacular of the students. If there were a two-level course, the balance of English and vernacular would vary. Practical training would be largely in the vernacular of the students (CCAP Minutes for Joint Theological College Committee (JTCC) of January, 1957).

Therefore, the unification of church structure approach would then imply that the General Assembly would solely take the responsibility for the training of ministers in collaboration with Presbyteries. The calling and appointment of ministers could come from the congregation. Ministers could transfer from the Northern, Southern, Central and Eastern political regions with no restrictions. Deregistration of all properties owned by individual CCAP Synods would go to the CCAP General Assembly in Malawi. However, to achieve theological training structural unification, there would be a merging of the ethnically-separated theological colleges into one-United Theological College under the General Assembly to train candidates called to serve in CCAP Synods in Malawi.

The unification church model could be applied to address this recurrent problem of ethnicity and ethnic divisions in the church and church structures of the CCAP, the Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi. This unification of church structure model would eliminate ethnicity by creating one-organisation in which ethnically-separated identities would be surrendered and merge into a council or association of churches for fellowship and action. The challenge for the unification of church structure model would be whether the individual CCAP Synods would accept giving up some of their interests such as autonomy, properties and scarce resources.

In the Reformed Church polity perspective, the agenda of major assemblies could only discuss issues that minor assemblies were not able to solve or issues that belonged on the agenda of a major assembly. Such issues of common interest such as doctrine, church order, theological training, examination of prospective ministers, and dialogue on socio-political issues with state government would typically be on the agenda of the major assembly—the General Synod (Monsma 1967:122).

In 2002, a new Constitution was enacted by the General Synod to replace the 1956 Constitution, as amended in 1958. All the Synods ratified it, as the ultimate source of authority to govern the church. Paragraph 8.1 of the 2002 Constitution stipulates:

The General Assembly is the Supreme Court of the Church. Its decisions are final and binding and are not subject to review by any other Court or body. The General Synod has jurisdiction over all Synods (Mapala 2016:319-320).

This unification church model could be applied to first amend the 2002 Constitution of the General Assembly Sections 4:5-6, 8:3:1-2, 8:7 that stipulate for CCAP Constitutional membership, CCAP Synods' authority and autonomy to completely eliminate ethnicity and restructure the church. The restructuring process would provide for dissolution of the current ethnic structures of CCAP Synods in order to decentralise administrative authority from CCAP Synods to the Presbyteries and local congregations. Local congregations from the Chewa, Tumbuka and Yao or Lhomwe ethnic groups could come together to form a Classis and Presbytery that would directly report to the General Assembly on all doctrinal policy issues, administrative matters, property issues and spiritual development of their congregations.

This would provide for a “borderless Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP),” where Synodal structures would cease to exist as centres of administration in the three

political regions of Malawi. Separate identities would be surrendered. When denominations overcome ethnicity and unite in this unification structure model, there would often be merging of local congregations as well. Membership and ordination would be held jointly.

Local churches would rightfully restore their “church council” as “the highest authority” and be viewed as a complete church according to Scripture and the Reformed Church polity perspective. In broad outlines, local congregations from the Chewa, Tumbuka and Yao or Lhomwe ethnic groups would come together to form a Classis and Presbytery that would directly report to the General Assembly. The abolition of Synods would centralise the CCAP General Synod operations, put an end regional *de facto* churches, and it would also foster the unity of the church. Synods would cease to be autonomous-regional blocks of ethnicity. In addition, it would enable CCAP congregations in affected areas to manage ethnicity and merge without restriction (Mapala 2016:348). The unification of church structure approach essentially emphasizes purity of doctrinal belief, the Confessions and a practical lifestyle (Erickson 1998:1142f).

#### **5.6.4.3 The challenge of language in Malawi**

The challenge of language would need a practical solution. Malawi is home to numerous ethnic cultures and languages. Language is a symbol of cultural identity that requires protection (Mapala 2016:75f). Culture, values and beliefs are signs that man is a creature who belongs to an inherit community (Van Peursen in Dreyer 2005:797). Some major languages spoken in Malawi are English, Chichewa, Tumbuka, Tonga, Chinkhonde, Nyachusa, Yao, Lhomwe, and Sena. Once again, as stated earlier, everybody should in a realistic way be able to express himself in his mother-tongue than if he is not able to use another language. The synod should then provide for the

translation services. The point is not the culture or the language are the norm, but service in the best possible way in the church. The norm is the best possible standard.

#### **5.6.4.3.1 The use of mother-tongue**

The use of mother-tongue could be a realistic approach to resolve the practical problem of language in mission outreach and church polity in Malawi. Many missionary policies urged church workers to learn a mother-tongue of the people to whom they were serving. It was this spirit that motivated most missionaries to engage in language translation and literacy development in different indigenous languages, as a symbol of people's identity to whom they were evangelising (Mapala 2016:75). Therefore, the churches in CCAP Synods could emulate the way in which Calvin dealt away with ethnicity and embraced people from different races and language backgrounds in the Geneva church (Baloyi 2010:9-10f). Regarding membership, Christian members would be free to attend the CCAP church service of their choice without restriction. Therefore, the unification church structure model would strengthen fellowship and oneness of the CCAP Synods in Malawi.

#### **5.6.4.3.2 Translation**

Translation could be another approach to ease the problems of communication due to the variety of languages of different people, but this would depend on their needs. The relevant approach to resolve the problem of language would be Bible translation, done by the Bible Society of Malawi with assistance from churches.

For the purpose of this study, the unification church model would be the best approach to be applied to overcome ethnicity and accommodate ethnic diversity in the CCAP Synods in Malawi.

## 5.7 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed how ethnic diversity could be accommodated in the contemporary church from a Reformed Church polity perspective. The question stated for the chapter was as follows: how could ethnic diversity be accommodated in the contemporary CCAP from a Reformed Church polity perspective? The aim of this chapter was to construct an approach that could be applied for overcoming ethnicity and accommodating ethnic diversity in the contemporary church based on the experience of the GKSA in South Africa; how ethnic based structures developed in the church decades prior to 2009 and after 2009, and how the GKSA managed to restructure itself to accommodate ethnic diversity (Synod GKSA 1997, Acta 1997:865 & 2000, Acta: 501).

The GKSA process did not aim at unification of separate and independent church communities, but rather a unification of the structures of the church community that already existed in South Africa. To some extent, there was an important similarity between the GKSA in South Africa and the CCAP Synods in Malawi. To assist in this study, the following structure was used:

- Mission work in the early years of the GKSA.

The study indicated that the first Synod of the GKSA made positive decisions for the importance of mission work under the influence of Rev. Dick Postma in 1862 (Fick 2009:4, 15). The first congregations to be established in the Cape Colony were at Burgersdorp (January 1860), and Colesberg (December 1860). Winburg and Redderburg in 1859, and Middleburg in Cape Colony, in the Moirivier district, Pretoria, along the Crocodile River, Nylstroom, Lydenburg and many

others in the Republic of Transvaal (Spoelstra 1989:73). Therefore, the earliest decisions approved by the Synods of the GKSA supported the ideas of missions in the church (Synods 1869, 1973, Van Wyk (2016:5-7).

- Theological training in the GKSA.

This study established that in 1869, the GKSA Synod decided to found its own Theological training school in Burgersdorp more or less on the model of the Free University of Amsterdam, established by Abraham Kuyper (Van Wyk 2016:2). Because of the socio-political development in 1948 when the South African Government had legalized the apartheid policy, the GKSA decided to have multiple theological schools for the different ethnic groups, thus reflecting the apartheid policy of separate development of that time. The theological schools were at Hammanskraal for the Midlands Synod's- black students, Heidelberg for Soutpansberg Synod's-black students and the Potchefstroom Theological School for Potchefstroom Synod's-white students (Ramantswana 2015:5-6).

In 1994 after changes in socio-political context, in an effort for unification to accommodate ethnic diversity, the former theological schools that had held the separate structures were phased out. In 1995, the GKSA national synods met at Potchefstroom and agreed to unite the three separated theological schools of Hammanskraal, Heidelberg and Potchefstroom into one Theological School, at the North-West University where students from all areas of the population were to be trained (Ramantswana 2015:12).

- The formation of different Synods of the GKSA.

Because of the establishment of the GKSA missionary work in the Northern Transvaal in 1921, as stated earlier, strong congregations developed among the

black populations that eventually formed two National Synods: Midlands for black churches and Soutpansberg, also for black churches.

In response to the socio-political influences from both the South African society and legalization of apartheid in 1948, the GKSA developed four different National Synods such as the Potchefstroom for White congregations, Midlands and Scoutspansberg for the Black congregations and Southlands for Coloured/mixed congregations (Coertzen 2013:33). The General Synod of the four national synods was only functional during the apartheid era, meeting six times (1965, 1975, 1980, 1984, 1988 and 1992), and was non-functional, and it was, therefore, discontinued in 1992 (Ramantswana 2015:12).

- Unification of different synods of the GKSA.

Again, after the abolition of apartheid in South Africa in 1990 and the first democratic General Elections, which took place in South Africa in 1994, the socio-political changes and constitutional context rekindled theological thought to redefine the church. The GKSA enjoyed a long-standing “spiritual unity” and had no reason to remain divided structurally, unless it was because of differences based on purity of doctrine and the Confessions. Belief in Christ therefore constituted the church. Order ought to be seen as an essential part of the well-being of the church and the basic principles for order were founded in the Bible and Confessions (Vorster (2011:14-15).

In the period 2006 to 2009, the GKSA Potchefstroom continued a process of “structural unification” for the three former National Synods of Potchefstroom, Midlands and Southlands phased out and integrated to form one General Synod structure to accommodate ethnic diversity from 2003 to 2009 (Baloyi 2010:1). As

a rule, no less than 15 churches formed a classis. There were more or less 410 churches that had to be grouped into classes. Classes were made up of more churches, so that there could be adequate spiritual gifts to effectively deal with the agenda of ethnic diversity. Attention was to be paid to practical concerns such as distance and cost, as well as the availability of the necessary gifts (Synod GKSA 1997, Acta 1997:865 & 2000, Acta: 501).

- Unitary models for structures of the divided church.

This study indicates that there two unitary models for overcoming ethnicity and restructuring the ethnically-divided church. The unitary models are namely: the separatist church model and the unification of church structure model.

The separatist church model indicates that the church is one-community, but separated by socio-technical, political regions and culture. The unity of the church was not primarily of an external dimension, but of an internal and spiritual character. The unification of church structure model holds that the churches are a one-church community, by virtue of being committed to and serving the same Lord. The unification of church structure model emphasizes purity of doctrinal belief, the Confessions and lifestyle, but this approach struggles to overcome ethnicity and merge the different synods based on separate church structures to accommodate ethnic diversity. These two unitary models could be applied to manage ethnicity and restructure both the ethnically-separated based GKSA in South Africa and the CCAP Synods in Malawi respectively. Therefore, the unification of church structure model could be the best approach to be used for elimination of ethnicity and accommodate ethnic diversity in the CCAP Synods in Malawi.

## 5.8 Conclusion

This chapter discussed how ethnic diversity could be accommodated in the contemporary church from a Reformed Church polity perspective. The aim of this chapter was to understand the experience of the GKSA and develop principles as to how the racially- based structures developed in the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA) decades prior to 2009 and after 2009, and how the church managed ethnicity and the process of spiritual unification to accommodate ethnic diversity in South Africa.

In South Africa, the GKSA held that unity of the church was undoubtedly one of the central motifs of Calvin's theology and pastoral life (Baloyi 2010:3f). The unity of the church derives from its being grounded in the one God (Eph 4:1-6). The Scripture, the Confessions and Church Order are the instruments, means or norms by which decisions or viewpoints of churches can be tested (for example in synods). The Church Order, article 31 makes it clear that the Word of God and the Church Order are normative for the authority and validity of ecclesiastical decisions (GKSA CO art 31).

The formation of different synods and Theological training schools in the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA) began under the influence of socio-political division of the society in South Africa and in the CCAP Synods in Malawi in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Therefore, the unification of church structure model would manage ethnicity, foster unity and accommodate ethnic diversity in the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA) as well as the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) in Malawi. The major assemblies such as local churches, Classes, Regional and General Synods of the GKSA in South Africa and the CCAP Synods in Malawi would become effective-unifying "mother" bodies of the respective churches.

In order to illustrate how to manage ethnicity, Jesus crossed all ethnic and cultural barriers to share the gospel with the Gentiles. The ministry of Jesus was inclusive. He advocated the need for human sympathy to men of all races and He rebuked any attempt to solve ethnic racial problems by expedient militancy. The gospel is for every person, no matter what his or her race, social position or past sin. Christ longs to overcome ethnicity and redeem all ethnic groups so that He could use them to fulfil His mission of salvation.

The contemporary church could boldly eliminate ethnicity and restructure itself to accommodate the needs of an ethnic diverse community because it fulfils the global vision of the New Testament Christianity (Sequeira 2016:38). The churches in a fellowship of a structured assembly could display the marks of the true church in Christ, while at the same time being serious about the characteristics (attributes) of the church such as unity, sanctity, apostolicity and catholicity, and they could be in a better position to seek spiritual unity with one another (cf. 2012 Synod GKSA CO 48).

However, due to the effects of globalization, many churches are confronted with the challenge of the presence of people from different countries with a similar confessional background but with different national roots. It is difficult for churches to maintain their denominational identity to a high degree without adjusting the church polity and liturgy according to relevant context (Koffeman 2014:164). The contemporary church must be a reconciliatory as well as an accommodative community. Moral and spiritual aspects imply issues of inclusivity. Therefore, the unification of church structure model could be the best approach to overcome ethnicity, foster church unity and accommodate ethnic diversity in the church. This is how ethnic diversity could be accommodated in the contemporary church from the Reformed Church polity perspective.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter will discuss an evaluation, summary and conclusion for this dissertation. The study made an investigation to find out reasons why ethnicity and ethnic divisions exist as a recurrent problem in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Synods of Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma in Malawi. The aim of this dissertation was to explore whether ethnic divisions in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) and its structures could be illuminated to give insights into its history, causes, nature, impact and eventually, its dissolution.

In Africa, racial and ethnic discrimination were commonly practised in all church missions although the degree of practice varied (Mapala 2016:84, 122). The history of the CCAP indicated that structural divisions in the church in Malawi were mainly based on the political, socio-cultural and religious circumstances and linguistic matters (Sundkler & Steed 2000:467-480, 795ff). It was alleged that ethnic intolerance in Malawi was a social-technical product of the colonial and post-colonial eras (Mapala 2016:125). The Colonial Administrators employed a divide- and- rule strategy to serve their interests. In the 1890's the British Colonial administrators encouraged competition between ethnic groups and favoured certain ethnic groups that were friendly to them. The underlying factor for the choice of traditional chiefs to be included in the indirect rule scheme was the ability to govern a large political area (Mapala 2016:133).

The European Missionaries divided the CCAP Synods according to restricted areas of operation, in the North for Livingstonia, the South for Blantyre and the Centre for Nkhoma, respectively (Munyenyembe 2016:5f). Both the Church of Central Africa,

Presbyterian (CCAP) and the Government of Malawi adopted politically centralized hierarchical administrative systems which were developed by African traditions and Colonial European Masters from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Zeze 2014:175f). Collegialism which found its point of orientation not in Scripture, but in state government influenced church polity discourse in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Smit 2018:3-4). In the period of Collegialism, the form of government mostly found expression in a form of oligarchy executed by permanently elected functionaries of the church (synod). In this construction of the church, the synod becomes known as the church, or as it is sometimes expressed, the synod as the sum total of the different congregations (Smit 2018:3-4). However, collegialistic church government may be viewed as the direct opposite of reformed church polity, the government of Christ that executed by the proclamation of the Word (Smit 2018:3-4).

Therefore, the General Assembly of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) compromised its Reformed traditional heritage in terms of church polity, doctrinal unity, liturgy and ecumenism by adopting ethnic divisions within the church and its church structures. This arrangement led to an emergency of the endless border dispute along ethnic lines between the Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods in 1956, with no fruitful solution to this day (Mapala 2016:1f).

The aim of this chapter will be to make an evaluation for research findings from chapter 2 and present summarised and practical recommendations. For the purpose of evaluation, the following structure will be used:

- The purpose of the study
- Evaluation of main research findings.
- Summary of main chapter findings.

- Recommendations from the study

## **6.2 The purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was to assess the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods, and to evaluate to what extent, and how the structural divisions in the CCAP based on ethnicity can be analysed from a Reformed Church polity perspective. The central question was: to what extent and how the divisions in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) on the basis of ethnicity could be assessed from a Reformed Church polity perspective? To come to the assessment of the structure of the CCAP, the following questions reflected in sequence throughout the study:

6.2.1 What are the reasons for structural divisions based on ethnicity in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP)?

6.2.2 How was ethnicity managed in the New Testament church?

6.2.3 Which principles of church government applied in the organisation in the New Testament church?

6.2.4 How could ethnic diversity be accommodated in the contemporary church from the Reformed Church polity perspective?

In this chapter, research findings from the previous chapters will be summarised and practical recommendations will be presented. For the purpose of evaluation, the following structure is used:

## **6.3 Evaluation of main research findings**

### **6.3.1 Autocratic church government**

The study established that the autocratic church structure characterised the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) under the influence of the European Missionaries and the British Colonial Government. Other factors for the establishment of the autocratic system in the CCAP were the influence of African traditions and leadership style of President Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Congress Party in Malawi (Gama 2016/09/23, cf. Mapala 2016:260).

In the Reformed Church polity perspective, Church Order Article 28 of the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA) provides that civil authorities described, as institutions of God, are obliged to assist and protect the church and its office-bearers. It is incumbent on church ministers, elders and deacons to urge church members, to faithfully obey and honour the state authority. The church must endeavour, in the fear of the Lord, to retain goodwill of the civil authorities towards the church in the best interests of the church. Church assemblies must communicate with the state government in order to acquire the necessary cooperation of the state and, as the church of Christ, bear testimony to the state in cases of need (Du Plooy 1982:109).

The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Synods failed miserably in its responsibility to admonish state authority on good governing practices according to Scripture and the Reformed Church perspective. It is unbelievable to the ordinary member, as to how the church adopted the autocratic system of government in its structures with no regard to the consequences. The adoption of the autocratic system of

government in the church amounts to disaster. It is unacceptable, not scriptural and at odds with the New Testament Christianity.

In the Reformed Church polity perspective, Christ is the Sovereign Head of the church and the world. He has appointed a spiritual government distinct from civil government. Christ's spiritual government is pneumatologically-determined, whereas civil government is socio-political, and physically oriented. Everything belongs to God. God governs in Christ over the church and state and entire cosmos (Calvin in Smit 2014:133f). The Kingdom of God includes all forms of authority and governance, the different forms in the government of different institutions are all under the authority of Christ given to Him in heaven and on earth (Smit 2014: 135f, Mtt 28:18).

### **6.3.2 “Political” church government**

The study established that the political church government characterized the Church Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), the Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods. The political system of church government structure was adopted indirectly because of pressure from the political systems of the state government (Gama 2016/09/23).

It is shocking to learn from the media and Gama (2016/09/23) that church ministers re-position themselves for appointments in state government in Malawi (cf. Ross 1996: 85,103, Mapala 2016:276, 301). Some church ministers sympathise with state government in order to get political appointments to chaplaincy in government departments, as well as membership in boards of statutory organisations for authority, fame and resources, which principally means money in Malawi (Pass 2007:127, cf. Gama 2016/09/23). This political system of church government encourages nepotism

corruption, fraud which is not scriptural, normally unattainable and not in line with the Reformed Church polity perspective.

In the New Testament, the apostles of Christ went beyond the Jewish political borders to preach the gospel to the Gentiles despite persecution. The gospel is for every person, without restrictions in matters of background, race and socio-political position. Jesus Christ wants to overcome and redeem ethnic groups to fulfil His mission of salvation to the world. In the Reformed Church perspective, the lawful calling to office of a minister is not for personal gain. One's gift, *charismata* is for the local congregation, is to be serviceable to God's Kingdom and the intentions with His world (Janssen 2006:125). *Charisma* and *diakonia* are essential services, not only in the church, but also in a manifold way in the world, and centrally in the state.

In the Reformed Church polity perspective, there is a clear separation between the task and territory of the church and state. Both the church and the state are servants of God and, each in its own way serves the kingdom of God (Isa 49:23, Du Plooy 1982:109). The separation of the church and state is imperative. However, each governs its own territory and neither may dominate the other (Du Plooy 1982:109). Separation of the church and state must not be antagonistic (Smit 2013:131-132). The Presbyterian Church in America did not adhere to sections of the Westminster form of government that dealt with the church and state relations as early as 1721, when it denied "the right of the civil government to intrude into church affairs" (Hall, D. & Hall, J. 1994:10f).

### **6.3.3 Ethnic based church government**

This study established that the regionally ethnic church structure characterized the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), under the influence of the rule of traditional chiefs and of the European Missionaries from Scotland, England and South Africa. Both the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) and the Government of Malawi adopted the regionally ethnic system of administration developed by Colonial European Masters from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Zeze 2014:175f). The method of evangelization was to politically employ a particular dominant ethnic culture, practice and language for accessibility to various African structures of society (Zeze 2014:167ff).

In the CCAP, the ultimate objective of the Nkhoma Synod leadership was to claim the Central Region as its sphere of influence, because it was their exclusive missiological approach, coupled with economic and political reasons. That was the reason why the CCAP Nkhoma Synod became symbiotic in relationship with Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) that contributed to the fragmentation of the CCAP along ethnical lines (Gama 2016/09/23). It is unacceptable for the CCAP Nkhoma Synod to employ ethnicity and ethnic divisions as an exclusive strategy for gospel enterprise in Malawi (Mapala 2016:276, 301). Therefore, the endless border dispute between the Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods was not territorial, but existed due to compromised scriptural principles of evangelization compounded by political factors (Mapala 2016:1ff). The separatist church model based on ethnicity in the CCAP Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods are not scriptural, neither sustainable in line with the Reformed Church polity.

In the New Testament, in order to eliminate ethnicity, Jesus crossed ethnic and cultural barriers to share the gospel with the Gentiles (Mtt 8:5-17, Act 1:8). The gospel of Christ broke the ethnic divisions in the church (Jn 4:1-29, 8:1ff). The ministry of Jesus was inclusive. He advocated the need for human sympathy to men of all races and He rebuked any attempt to solve ethnic- racial problems by the expediency of militancy (Lk 19:1-407, Mk 16:15-20). In the New Testament Scripture, the apostles managed ethnicity and cultural divisions with love and compassion (Acts 6, 10, 15, 1 Cor 13, 14, Gal 3:28, Eph 4).

In the Reformed Church polity perspective, the legitimate church polity must be rooted in the principles of Holy Scripture and the Confessions regarding the church which provides the normative guidelines for the church (Haitjema in Koffeman & Smit 2011:9f). The Church Order (CO Article 1) provides that regarding the good order in the Church of Christ, it is necessary that there should be structures of offices, and assemblies; for the sake of supervision over doctrine, sacraments, ceremonies and church discipline (Janssen 2000:17).

#### **6.3.4 Hierarchical church government**

The study established that hierarchical church government characterized the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), in the Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods (Ross 1996:66). The church ministers were exclusively and principally political leaders who behaved like hierarchical rulers under the influenced of President Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP, Ross 1996: 85,103, Gama 2016/09/23).

In the Reformed Church polity perspective, offices precede the church in principle. Christ never transfers His authority to the office bearer in the church, but He charges them with the task of ministering Him in the church. The office bearers are nothing more than instruments in the hands of the Holy Spirit (Vorster 2011:15). They are not dignitaries with an authority based in their higher office, but first of all believers in service of Christ as the first and last authority for the whole church (Kung 1992:363).

There are points of differences between the church and state. The focus for church government is on spiritual dimension, while the state is responsible for the physical dimension. The church is a religious body that should not depend on the state for its functioning and for development of both church and state (Smit 2013:131). The best governments are those who submit themselves to the governance of the eternal King, Jesus Christ. In Reformed Church government, therefore there is no such thing as personal office hierarchy and ecclesiastical influence or power. Therefore, hierarchical system of church government characterized in the CCAP Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods are not scriptural, neither sustainable in light of the Reformed Church polity.

### **6.3.5 Unitary models for structures of the divided church**

In the New Testament, the call for unity is a summons to “keep” the fundamental oneness of life, which the one Spirit of God has imparted through regeneration (Eph 4:3). In South Africa, the GKSA Synods were divided on a racial or ethnical basis, but they remained one-church community where the different groups came together within one major assembly- the General Synod. The GKSA held that unity of the church was undoubtedly one of the central motifs of Calvin’s theology and one pastoral life (Baloyi 2010:3f). This unity of the church is based upon in the one God (Eph 4:1-6). It is through

the Word, the Spirit and the Confessions that God governs His church (Smit 2018:7). All the elect who belong to the church are truly one-church community (cf. Milne 1982: 215) and hence the true church will be distinguished by its unity.

In light of this discussion, the study indicates that there two unitary models that could be used to manage ethnicity and restructure the ethnically-divided church. The unitary models are namely: the separation of church structure model and the unification of church structure model.

#### **6.3.5.1 The separatist church model**

The separatist church model could be applied to overcome ethnicity and restructure the GKSA in South Africa and CCAP Synods in Malawi respectively. There are similarities in the application of this approach between the GKSA and CCAP Synods because they hold for the maintenance of their separated-ethnic structures. This model holds that the church is one-church community, but it is a structurally-separated model due to its socio-technical issues, politics, and traditional culture. The unity of the church is not primarily of an external dimension, but of an internal and spiritual character.

This is in line with the current structure of the CCAP where church boundaries remain fixed to make a separation of structures based on ethnic and political regions, traditional culture and language of the people. Under the influence of the traditional chiefs' rule and the European Missionaries from Scotland, England and South Africa, the CCAP adopted ethnicity and ethnic-based structures in Malawi. The structures of the CCAP Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods are based on ethnicity, according to political regionalism and traditional culture (Gama 2016/09/23).

Therefore, this separatist church model provides no amendment to the Constitution of the CCAP Synods and maintains the status quo. It continues to enjoy the undisturbed

communication between the structures of the CCAP Synods. It does not challenge the status quo and continues with the way the CCAP Synods have been operating over the decades. In this model, there are always endless problems, where solutions do not provide lasting answers and the same problems crop up repeatedly.

#### **6.3.5.2 The unification church model**

The unification church model could be applied to manage ethnicity in the GKSA in South Africa as well as to the CCAP Synods in Malawi. This model holds that GKSA churches in South Africa and the CCAP Synods are spiritually one-church community, by virtue of being committed to serve the same Lord in the invisible church, but they struggle to manage ethnicity and merge the different synods based on separated-ethnic structures. This unification church model overcomes ethnicity and creates one-organisation in which separate identities are surrendered and band together into a one-major council or association of churches for fellowship and action. Therefore, the GKSA churches and the CCAP Synods in this study, aim to eliminate ethnicity and form one-church structure to accomplish their common purpose based on ethnic diversity in South Africa and in Malawi.

The CCAP Synods in Malawi are spiritually one-church community. Emphasis could be on purity of doctrinal belief, the Confessions and lifestyle. The model would first require amending the 2002 Constitution of the General Assembly Sections 4:5-6, 8:3:1-2, 8:7 that stipulate the CCAP Constitutional membership, CCAP Synods' authority and autonomy to completely restructure and reform the church. The restructuring would provide for dissolution of the current politically-ethnic structures of CCAP Synods in order to decentralise the administrative authority from CCAP Synods to the Presbyteries and local congregations.

There would be the merging of the existing ethnically-based separate Theological Colleges into one united Theological College under the General Assembly to train candidates called to serve in all CCAP Synods without restrictions. The General Assembly would be responsible for the training of ministers for the entire CCAP Synods in collaboration with the Presbyteries. Presbyteries in consultation with congregations and church councils could ordain ministers and such documents for the ministers of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) could be in the safe-keeping of the General Assembly Office. The calling and appointment of ministers could come from the congregation not from the Synod to respond to the ecclesiastical, socio-political, linguistic needs in order to easily manage conflicts in the church. Ministers of the Word would freely transfer from the Northern, Southern, Central and Eastern political regions with no boundary restrictions. De-registered properties from respective CCAP Synods could be handed over to the General Assembly. The challenge for this approach could be whether the respective CCAP Synods would be willing to surrender the autonomy, properties and scarce resources.

For the purpose of this study, the unification church model is the best approach to be applied to eliminate ethnicity and restructure the CCAP Synods because it aims at transforming the church, maintaining the virtue of being committed to serving the same Lord in the invisible church, and merging the different synods based on separated-ethnic structures. This unification church model emphasizes purity of doctrinal belief, the Confessions and practical lifestyle.

## **6.4 Summary for the studied chapter findings**

### **6.4.1 Chapter 1: Introduction to the study**

This introduction aimed at investigating whether ethnicity and ethnic divisions in the CCAP and church structures could be illuminated to give insights into their history, causes, nature, and impact and eventually how the church could manage the question of ethnicity.

### **6.4.2 Chapter 2: Ethnicity and church structure divisions in the CCAP Synods**

This chapter discussed factors for structural divisions based on ethnicity and ethnic divisions in the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) in Malawi. The study aims at indicating that the hierarchical and ethnic leadership style from the European Scottish and South African Missionaries influenced, to a certain extent, the church polity discourse, government and practice in Malawi, negatively.

The chapter established that influences from Scotland and South Africa played a significant role in the organization and church polity discourses. The establishment of the major General Synod Assembly in September 1924 was a first step towards structural unity for the CCAP Synods in Malawi. The Scottish and South African's racially-prejudiced politics negatively influenced the ecumenical unity of the CCAP General Synod. The General Synod, as the highest spiritual authority was committed to promote Reformed Church tradition and ecumenical unity.

### **6.4.3 Chapter 3: Ethnicity in the New Testament Church**

This chapter reflected on the question of how ethnicity was managed in the New Testament Church. This study aims at exploring the fact that ethnicity existed as a

recurrent problem based on the traditional culture between the Jewish believers who spoke Aramaic, and the Hellenistic believers from the diaspora who spoke Greek and how the early church managed the phenomenon. The study indicated that the Lord God called Abraham from an ethnic group. The people of Israel were called to be God's agents for His mission to the rest of the people of God in the world. In order to eliminate ethnicity, Jesus Christ crossed all ethnic and cultural barriers to share the gospel with the Gentiles. The ministry of Jesus was inclusive. The apostles of Jesus Christ went beyond the Jewish borders to preach the gospel to the Gentiles despite persecution. The gospel was for every person, no matter what his or her race, social position or past sin.

The chapter, indicated that the church is the new people of God, made possible by belief in Christ and the Confessions. Christ is the new identity for Christian believers. The diverse nature of the church must be reflected in the local church. The church could manage ethnicity and ethnic divisions based on the new identity in Christ. The contemporary church is a one church unit in diversity displaying diversity amid unity. The contemporary church has a new identity based on Christ.

#### **6.4.4 Chapter 4: The church governance in the light of the New Testament**

This study aimed at investigating scriptural principles of church government applied to the organisation in the New Testament Church in the Reformed Church polity perspective. The scriptural principles of the New Testament Church are pillars on which the legitimate *Presbyterial* system of church government rests as the basis for assessing the hierarchical-ethnically based system in the church.

The study indicated that the local church is a complete church, known as the assembly of believers. In the local church, believers are those who are bound together by

common belief and the Confessions. The study established that the church and state are appointed by God and are servants of God. Each one in its own way serves the kingdom of God: -thus the church has to obey the government, pray for it and where desired, bear testimony towards it. The government, on the other hand, has to create room for the church to fulfil its calling in the world, it should protect the church and assist it in serving the kingdom of God. In church and state, each authority governs its own territory and neither may dominate the other. There is no such thing as personal office hierarchy and ecclesiastical influence or power.

#### **6.4.5 Chapter 5: Ethnic diversity in the contemporary church**

This chapter focused on how ethnic diversity could be accommodated in the contemporary church from the Reformed Church polity perspective. The study aims at constructing an approach that could be applied to overcome ethnicity and accommodate ethnic diversity in the contemporary CCAP based on the experience of the GKSA in South Africa; how ethnic based structures developed in the church decades prior to 2009 and after 2009, and how the GKSA managed to manage ethnicity and restructure itself to accommodate ethnic diversity. To some extent, there is an important similarity between the GKSA in South Africa and the CCAP in Malawi. The GKSA unification processes was, in fact, not aimed at merging separate and independent church communities, but rather manage ethnicity and foster unification of the structures of the church community that already existed.

To some extent, there was an important similarity between the GKSA in South Africa and the CCAP Synods in Malawi. The CCAP Synods in Malawi were divided on ethnical grounds, but they remained one-church community where the different ethnic church groups came together within one General Synod in 1924. The CCAP Synods' unification

was not aimed at merging separate and independent church communities, but overcomes ethnicity and foster unification of the structures of the church community that already existed in Malawi

This study indicated that there are two unitary models used for the restructuring of the ethnically-divided church. The unitary models are: the separatist church model, and the unification of church structure model. The separatist church model maintains separation of structures based ethnicity, socio-technical issues, politics, and traditional culture. The unification of church structure model holds that the churches are one-church community committed to serve the same Lord. Emphasis is on purity of doctrinal belief, the Confessions and lifestyle, and a struggle to manage ethnicity and merge the different synods based on separate structures to accommodate ethnic diversity. This model could be applied to eliminate ethnicity and restructure the CCAP Synods to accommodate ethnic diversity in Malawi.

#### **6.4.6 Chapter 6: Conclusion**

This chapter aimed at discussing an evaluation, summary and conclusion of the study.

#### **6.5 Recommendations from the study**

In light of the discussion of this dissertation, the following recommendations are made:

##### **6.5.1 The two unitary models**

There are two unitary models used for managing ethnicity and practical restructuring of an ethnically-divided church. The unitary models are: the separatist church model and the unification church model.

The separatist church model maintains separation of structures based on ethnicity, socio-technical issues, politics, and traditional culture. The proclamation of the gospel is

directed at a separate particular ethnic people or cultural community, and, therefore, the church gives shape to the message of the gospel in that separated-ethnic cultural community. The unification church model was applied to manage ethnic separation and accommodate ethnic diversity in the GKSA in South Africa and could similarly be applied to manage ethnicity and accommodate ethnic diversity in the CCAP Synods in Malawi. The unification church model overcomes ethnicity and creates one-spiritual organisation in which separate identities are surrendered and bound together into a one-major council or association of churches for fellowship and action.

### **6.5.2 Amendment of the CCAP Constitution**

The study recommends that the unification church model could be applied to manage ethnicity and restructure separate CCAP Synods in order to achieve ethnic diversity in the church in Malawi. The unification church model would first require amendment of the 2002 Constitution of the General Assembly Sections 4:5-6, 8:3:1-2, 8:7 that stipulate the following: the CCAP Constitutional membership, CCAP Synods' authority and autonomy, to completely restructure the church.

The restructuring would provide for the dissolution of the current politically ethnically-separated structures of CCAP Synods in order to decentralise the administrative authority from CCAP Synods to Presbyteries and local congregations. Local congregations from the Chewa, Tumbuka and Yao or Lhomwe ethnic groups could come together to form a new Classis and Presbytery that would directly report to the General Assembly on all doctrinal policy issues, administrative matters, property issues and spiritual development of the congregations.

This approach would provide for a "borderless Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP)," where Synodal structures will cease to exist as centres of administration in the

three political regions of Malawi. Local churches would rightfully restore their “church council” as “the highest authority” and be re-defined as a complete church according to Scripture and the Reformed Church polity perspective. In broader-terms, local congregations from the Chewa, Tumbuka and Yao or Lhomwe ethnic groups could come together to form a new Classis and Presbytery that would directly report to the General Assembly.

### **6.5.3 The need for practical solutions to practical problems**

The problem of language would require a practical solution. The mother-tongue Scripture has a fundamental place in the engagement of the gospel and culture. The mother-tongue is the language in which God speaks to the people. The valuable approach would be Bible translation and interpretation. Questions on doctrinal policy issues, administrative matters, property issues and spiritual development could be addressed when they come together on the relevant major venues. A Christian member would be free to attend the CCAP church service of his or her choice without restriction. There would be merging of the existing ethnically-separated Theological Colleges into one-united Theological College under the CCAP General Assembly to train candidates who would be called to serve in all the CCAP Churches without restrictions.

### **6.5.4 Future research study**

Future researchers would have to do investigation on the question of the church and culture, and how the contemporary church could integrate church polity in relation to traditions, values and culture of the people it serves. Another investigation could be done on the relationship between church and state, to explore reasons why most CCAP church ministers become involved in partisan politics at the expense of the church, and how to create the best approach for the situation in Malawi.

## 6.6 Conclusion

Christianity spans across many ethnic people-groups on the globe. Scripture holds that the people of Israel were called to be God's agents in His mission to the rest of the people of God in the world. Jesus Christ crossed all ethnic and cultural barriers to share the gospel with the Gentiles. The gospel is for everyone without restriction based on status, age gender, race and ethnicity (cf. Jn 4:1-26, LK 7:1-10, Mk 5:1-34ff).

Changes in political and constitutional context demand ethnic diversity to be managed orderly by the contemporary church (Dreyer 2005:803ff). Christ is the Head of the church, the source of all its authority and so governs His church. The Lordship of Christ means that He is Master, the One who rules and makes decisions for the church. The Lordship of Christ is one of the central doctrines of the Scripture and the Reformed Church polity (cf. Mtt 7:21f, Act 2:36, 1 Pet 3:15, Rom 10:9-14, Col 2:6). Belief in Christ constitutes the church (Mtt 16:16-19). Jesus Christ is the (new) identity for Christian believers. The Christian must be rooted in common belief in Christ and the Confessions. It is through the Word, Spirit and the Confession that God governs His church and church structures.

The function of the church must be to incorporate separate ethnic groups into its new community under the One God (cf. Milne 1982: 215). All church meetings must have the same or equal authority, because different church meetings in principle have the same responsibility. The church should decide the points on the agenda in the light of the Word of God (Smit 2018:7). The binding effect of church decisions therefore lies in the Word and not in a person, a church structure or a moderamen of the church. Humans (synods) are fallible; the Reformed church polity provides the possibility to re-evaluate and to correct the decisions in light of the Word of God if necessary. It is not the synod

that should have the last say on a matter, but the Word of God (CO 31:46 in Smit 2018:7).

Therefore, Christianity is about being in a priestly love-relationship with God and one another (Smith 2012:6). The ecumenical mission and legitimate church polity for the contemporary church must aim at overcoming ethnicity and unifying different people-groups within the church according to principles of Scripture through the Holy Spirit. This is how ethnicity in the church and church structures could be assessed in the CCAP Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi in the Reformed Church polity perspective.

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