

RESEARCH ARTICLE

An inquiry into ethnicity in structures of the church: the case study of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian CCAP in Malawi

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Abstract

This article seeks to address the question of ethnicity and ethnic divisions within the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Synods of Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma in Malawi. The argument is presupposing that ethnic identity and relations exist whether the ethnic groups are competing or not only within the church but also outside church walls. What should be transformed and eliminated are the attitudes, behaviours and practices of manipulation respectively. Ethnicity, on the one hand, when abused can be the root of many serious internal problems connected with human rights and social justice. The impact of ethnicity and ethnic divisions if not checked could bring disastrous consequences to the church and elsewhere. On the other hand, when appropriated properly, ethnicity and ethnic divisions could be positive ingredients that guarantee the realization of the idea of church by enhancing participation, integration of loyalties and commitment to the public good of the church.

Keywords: Ethnicity, ethnic divisions, church structure, Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), influences, church government.

Introduction

This article discusses reasons for the existence of ethnicity and ethnic divisions in the structures of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), Synods of Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma in Malawi. Zeze (2014:177) argues that the CCAP in Malawi is exclusively structured, based on ethnicity and ethnic divisions due to geographical, traditional, economic, political, historical and Christian-ecclesial conditions in which certain aspects were able to influence negatively their polity discourse and practice during their establishment in the 19th Century. The governing structures in most Malawian churches became an imitation of the ruling structures of traditional society and state (Paas 2007:8). Msangaambe (2011:63f) holds that the church uncritically derived its polity from that of traditional Nyau cult and drew its leadership from the ethnic Chewa and Ngoni Chiefs/Village Headmen (Nkosini) and other leaders of society. The ethnic leadership concepts and style from both traditional leaders and White Missionaries were inherited to a certain extent either positively or negatively the Church's polity discourse, practice and church government.

Kaspin (1995:595-620) asserts that during Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda's 31 years of power (Banda a Chewa), the Chewa ethnic group promoted ties of ethnic solidarity and regionalism to acquire political dominance. In the first years of Independence, two languages were written 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-Chinyanja renamed Chichewa and that all ethnic languages such as Chiyangonde, Nyachusa, Tonga, Yao, Lomwe, Sena, including Chitumbuka would be disallowed in government offices, schools, the Press and radio. Later it was clarified as a way of fostering communication and national unity, the extent to which it entailed a new mythology of Malawi's cultural identity soon became apparent. Chewa identity was Malawi's identity and the President was the embodiment of both. In 1970's the President authorized the establishment of the Department of Linguistics and Chichewa at Chancellor College, University of Malawi. Dr Banda celebrated with joy Chewa language and culture while vilifying Northerners and ignoring Southerners (Kaspin 1995:595-620).

The 1994 General election betokened tribalism and ethnicity whereby Southern region voted 49 % for UDF's Bakili Muluzi a yao, 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 voting pattern in 1994 was an ethnicity in the negative, a reaction rather than proactive defined by a relationship of contrast to the hegemonic group as the significant, self-defining other (Kaspin 1995:595-620). Ross (1996:265) asserts that Church leadership too often mirrors the corruption and graft prevalent in wider society, rather than offering a challenge to it. Clergy seek authority within the Church structures in order to gain power, fame, and resources principally money (Pass 2007:127). The clergy were considered exclusive principal leaders who behave like autocratic rulers.

The study argues that biased and compromised interpretation of the doctrine of the church leads to unscriptural understanding of church structures and polity.

The view of “church” in Malawi like many other African societies is informed from the African philosophy of life based on ethnic community comprising of the living and those who are long dead (Mafico 2005:71). In many areas in Africa, the ancestral spirits cannot be by-passed because they are intermediaries between God and human beings (Mbiti 1999:66). This conception presupposes strong hierarchical structure beginning with the family stretches out to include the ethnic clan and tribe leading to ethnicity and ethnic divisions (Mafico (2005:72f). For example, in Malawi in predominantly Chewa region, there are two ethnically different systems of CCAP Churches. The Livingstonia Synod Churches exclusively for the Tumbuka ethnic group and Nkhoma Synod Churches exclusively for the Chewa ethnic group in Lilongwe, Salima, Nkhota Kota, Mchinji and Kasungu. In the CCAP Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods, over the years, ethnicity has also been exposed by arrogantly planting Churches and Prayer Houses in each other’s jurisdiction. Over 89 and 78 Churches/prayers houses respectively have been structurally divided, destroyed and re-planted in each other’s territory in seven decades (Jere 2006:03:05).

Definition of terms

The point of departure for this discussion is to define the key words such as “ethnic” (adjective) means connected with, belonging to nation, tribe, race, or people that share a cultural tradition (Jenkins 1997:9-13). “Ethnicity” (technical, noun) is defined as the fact of belonging to a particular race or tribe: many important factors may be related for example class, gender, age and ethnicity (Hornby 2010:500). In the New Testament Church, ethnicity was related to two ethnol groups in the Apostolic community: there existed an “ethnic boundary” of tension based on circumcision and dietary customs between Hellenistic believers and 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 relations between the parts of something complex, the quality of being well organized, or 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).

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the study is to explore and describe to what extent and how the structural divisions in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) based on ethnicity can be assessed from a Reformed Church polity perspective. The central question is: to what extent and how can the divisions in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) on the basis of ethnicity be assessed from a Reformed Church polity perspective? What are the historical reasons for structural divisions based on ethnicity in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP)? How can the question of ethnicity and ethnic divisions be

resolved in the church? How should ethnic diversity be accommodated in the contemporary church today?

Research Problem

The research problem of this article will be to investigate and examine whether ethnic division in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) and its structures can be illuminated to give insights into its history, causes, nature, impact and eventually its dissolution. The hypothesis of the article will be that the 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 a sound application of church polity principles according to Scripture.

Methodology of the Research

From the Reformed Church perspective, it is accepted that Scriptures are the Word of God and that Jesus Christ governs His church. The study mainly comprises of a purely descriptive literature study which includes as is applicable to different sections, a focus on qualitative, historical, and contemporary resources. In achieving the objectives of the paper, intense research was required to find relevant data and the information from the Libraries of North West University Theological Library, Blantyre Synod Library, Journals and internet.

The relevance of ethnicity and ethnic divisions in the CCAP Church in Malawi

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

Influences from Scotland and England

According to Sundkler & Steed (2000:467-80, 795ff), the person who initiated missionary work which developed into the establishment of the Livingstonia and Blantyre Synods was Rev Dr James Stewart. He could originally be traced back to Scotland but settled at Lovedale Mission in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. The life, work and death of David Livingstone in 1873 inspired at least three Missions to begin their work in Malawi namely: The Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland and the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA), later called the Anglican Church from England. After attending the funeral of Livingstone in Westminster Abbey, Rev Dr James Stewart felt strongly that launching a mission in Central Africa in memory of Livingstone was imperative and on April 18, 1874 the indelible impression caught fire in his mind. He appealed to the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland to support the

noble cause. Rev Dr James Stewart passionately concluded his speech by the following words:

I would humbly suggest, as the truest memorial of Livingstone, the establishment by this church, or several churches together of an institution at once industrial and educational, to teach the truths of the Gospel and the arts of civilized life to the natives of the country, and which shall be placed in a carefully selected and commanding spot in Central Africa, where from its position and capabilities it might grow into a town, and afterwards into a city, and become a great Centre of commerce, civilization and Christianity, and this I would call Livingstonia (Selfridge 1976:19-20).

The Livingstonia Synod

The establishment of Livingstonia Synod in 1875 was started by Rev Dr Robert Laws. After some difficult travelling up the Zambezi River and on land they reached the Shire River in Malawi, the country of their destination, and on 12 October 1875 they sailed onto the Lake Malawi itself. Young called for the Old Hundredth (Psalm) to be sung in praise to the Lord their 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).

The difficulties of inhospitable climatic conditions, illnesses and deaths of the missionaries forced them to move to Bandawe among the Tonga in the Northern part of Lake Malawi in 1881. An overwhelming response from the lakeside Tonga resulted in church congregations being planted. The earlier “Christian village” program at Bandawe was abandoned and replaced by evangelization and schools in the Tonga villages. The Tonga schools enrolled more than 1 000 students in 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 overwhelmingly increased from 107 to over 3 000 pupils (Pachai 1973:21). According to Velsen (in Sundkler & Steed 2000:472), the 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. The hold of traditional Tonga religion was very strong and the first converts did not appear until 1889. The chief who governed in the Tonga land was Chief Mankhambira. He was opposed to the establishment of churches in his area but when the Ngoni who came from Mzimba invaded the land, Chief Mankhambira asked for military help from the missionaries, “an effective medicine” to defeat the Ngoni and new economic outlets in return he would Christian churches in the Atonga land. The Atonga then welcomed the mission’s employment on a wage basis, and the opening of new vistas (Sundkler & Steed 2000:473-74).

The outstanding pioneer missionaries to northern Malawi were Rev Dr Robert Laws; head of “Livingstonia” and one of the great strategists of the centre who led the Mission for fifty years, his fellow Scottish was Rev Dr. W. A. Elmslie, missionary to the Ngoni and the dynamic Donald Fraser who influenced both the Tonga and the Ngoni. Frequent mission expansions were also soon made among the Ngoni in Mzimba, Chewa in Kasungu, Tumbuka in Loudon and Ekwendeni.

The Livingstonia Presbytery met for the first time in 1889, marking the first step the church was taking towards self-sufficiency (Thompson 1975:7). As a consequence of the exceptional educational response from Tonga, Tumbuka and Ngoni, the Overtoun Institution was opened in Livingstonia Mission in 1894. This school ensured “the continued pre-eminence of northern Nyasaland in the field of education.” 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 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.

This study, therefore, contends that 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 “hierarchalism” 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 have organized on highly centralized autocratic lines. The Free Church of Scotland was a decentralized body with semi-autonomous parishes controlled by a minister supported and to some degree supervised, by a committee of lay elders.

However, the Livingstonia Synod harboured strong tendencies toward hierarchicalism 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 (1995:178) quotes the remarks made by Rev W. A. Elmslie in Livingstonia Synod who sharply said about his African colleague:

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

The Livingstonia Synod Missionaries coming from the Liberal Free Church failed to practice the Reformed church polity and order of the sending “mother body” at home. Furthermore, Thompson (1995:178) and McCracken (1977:290) quote Donald Fraser who again sharply emphasized:

Our native pastors are not equal with European ministers.

In the process they felt out of convenience to carry out the ministry of divide and rule even among the ethnic Tonga, Tumbuka and Nkhonde in the Northern Region in 1875. On the seat of authority in the church, the Livingstonia Synod held the concept that Christ rules the church through office-bearers. The authority of the church is centred in the offices that constitute the highest assembly. Therefore, the Synod is the highest court of the church, with the Presbytery as the basic governmental unit and the church council as the lowest court. In the Church of Scotland, the Presbytery was confirmed as the basic unit

in the government of the church. Ministers were considered as first, among equals, to become members of the Presbytery and Synod by their separation in ordination, through Christ's sacraments, His Word and Spirit using office-bearers with representation in assembly as found in the Scottish Presbyterian ecclesiology as was maintained. In 1956, the Presbytery of Livingstonia attained 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.

The Blantyre Synod

The Blantyre Synod was established by Henry Henderson in 1976. 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 that 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 birth place of Dr. David Livingstone on 23rd October 1876 (Selfridge 1976:32).

The Scottish missionary beginnings at Blantyre were difficult, dramatic and controversial. In this ethnic Yao dominated area, refugee slaves would turn up, seeking shelter at the missionary's house. Small communities were established, a motley group of refugees and individuals from varied backgrounds, including educated Kololo. The mission estates employed them all and at the same time gave them the foundations of an education. In the Mission village they were exempted from the traditional chief's control. The mission staff, often European lay artisans, exercised virtual chiefly authority, taking over the role of Magistrate and Civil Governor. In one instance the "Blantyre Atrocities" in 1878, severe disciplinary action, led to death. The event was widely publicized and the Mission both in Malawi and in Scotland defended its position with difficulty. The injurious effects of "Social Darwinism" had led to an estrangement between white and black. At this difficult time, the Blantyre Mission was fortunate that it received a new leader, Rev David Clement Scott, one of the outstanding Missionaries of his time (at Blantyre 1881-1897 when he left Malawi for Kenya). Rev David Scott insisted on the David Livingstone heritage, combining "Christianity, Civilization and Commerce," (popularly known as three CCC), a formula which Scott translated as the "Gospel and Modern Culture" which also meant deep respect for African culture. He and his 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-his ecclesiastical program.

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

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

However, many other British missionaries of the day, Scott's views on African race and culture were progressive. He opposed certain elements of traditional culture as incompatible with Christianity (e.g. initiation rituals, polygamy) but he did not condemn African customs wholesale. In 1898, he was forced to resign his post probably for health reasons and Alexander Hetherwick his assistant assumed leadership. After his furlong in Scotland, Scott proceeded to Kenya where he founded the Kikuyu Mission called the Presbyterian Church in East Africa. Rev David Scott died after he succumbed to thrombosis of the legs in 1907.

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

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

My way is open. I am glad my children are all educated, married and settled. I am not worried. I have done my duty (Sundkler & Steed 2000:799).

However, the church polity in Blantyre Synod was characterized by tendencies “hierarchalism”. Ecclesiastical power in Blantyre Synod was the establishment of the all-white “Mission Council” of the Blantyre Mission as the “first governing assembly”. This was followed by the founding of a Kirk Session around 1900 at the St Michaels and All Angels Church, the Blantyre Presbytery in 1904 and the Blantyre Synod in 1956. The powerful ecclesiastical “Mission Council” was responsible to the “Home Committee” in Scotland. 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 Blantyre Synod. It controlled the larger resources including land, all buildings, schools, hospital, churches and funds.

The local session and presbytery had little or no control over major elements in the staff and property of the churches in their area. The “Mission Council”, in effect a white oligarchy, controlled all the major financial resources in the field, paying African ministers, teachers and evangelists (for most full-time staff), and controlling their posting and work. Neither the Kirk Sessions formed in 1900 nor the Blantyre Presbytery founded in 1904 had any authority over these vital matters. Matters pertaining to vision, mission and directions in which the church should expand appeared on the agenda of the “Mission Council”. Between 1904 and 1924, the Blantyre Presbytery was officially the highest ecclesiastical court for Europeans and Africans in all church matters, but in reality the “Mission Council” was responsible for everything in Blantyre Synod. However, the Blantyre Synod Missionaries, who came from the Established Conservative Church of Scotland, felt the need to remain in the Southern Region of Malawi and minister among the Yao and Lomwe in 1876 (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 4th November 1894.

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

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

According to the Synod Conference of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Blantyre Synod in 1993, issued a statement which acknowledged historical close ties in its structures with the Malawi Congress Party and Malawi Government so that:

The church gradually lost its ability to admonish or speak pastorally to the government and indicated that they did not want to make the same mistake at this time in order to ensure that the church retains its prophetic voice throughout

the coming years of our country's history (Blantyre Synod Conference Minutes August 1993).

Influences from South Africa

The Nkhoma Synod

The origin of the fourth mission initiative to arrive in Malawi was from the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) of Cape Town in South Africa. Rev Andrew C Murray first arrived in Malawi in 1885. He toured mission fields in which his synod would work and recommended that "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 31st July 1888 where Rev Dr Robert Laws warmly welcomed him. He stayed there for a period of time in order to gain some experience with the Livingstonia Mission while he looked for a suitable site for his own mission (Selfridge 1976:61).

In July 1889, Rev T C B Vlok, the second missionary of the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (DRCM), arrived in Malawi. With the help of Rev Murray, Rev Vlok toured the South- West of the lake and on 28th November 1889, they chose a new site in 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 which was considered the boundary between the Scottish Mission of Livingstonia and the Dutch Mission of Nkhoma. The work of the Dutch Reformed Mission (DRCM) was under the supervision of the Livingstonia Mission until 1897 when it became independent.

The Dutch Reformed Church (DRCM) of the Western Cape soon established the Nkhoma Mission Station at Mvera and drew ethnic boundaries in 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 (DRC) Missionaries increased accordingly. They met baffling problems affecting the African population including the hut tax and migrant labour. The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) Missionaries later became advocates for the Africans against the colonial government policies. The effects of migrant labour roused them to imaginative measures in the form of home craft and industries, weekly markets, mass literacy campaigns and emphasis on care of the family. The other emphasis of the Afrikaner Mission was on agriculture; at the same time, it was part of the school program to politically resist the English language as far as possible. Every African Christian member at Mvera and Nkhoma was required to have a garden for modern farming. The Mission played a central role in promoting modern agriculture in the Central Region. The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) was the only church mission in Africa known to introduce its own currency at this time. Money was non-existent and they invented a coin the size of a penny, punched with two holes and stamped "MM," (Mvera Mission, Sundkler & Steed 2000:478). The new centre at Nkhoma Mission soon became a little town with post office,

hospital, nurses training college, teacher's 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).

Although the church government of the Nkhoma Synod was said to be Reformed or Presbyterian, in which Jesus Christ alone exercised His rule and authority through His Word and the Holy Spirit using office-bearers who assembled in formal ecclesiastical assemblies, it was characterized by hierarchicalism among office-bearers and assemblies, as well as clericalism because the church was organized as a top-down system with clerical officers on committees and at Synod level being particularly powerful (Ross 1996:183). One of the reasons was that the Nkhoma Synod developed the hierarchical system in the context of its geographical landscape, and under the social-political, economic and Christian - ecclesial conditions in which certain aspects were able to influence negatively its polity discourse and practice. In addition, the Nkhoma Synod uncritically imitated ruling systems of society, religious bodies, and other churches such as Scottish Missions, the Nyau secret society and the Malawi State government (Msangaambe 2011:63f).

Evaluation of the ethnic based church system for the CCAP in Malawi

In this section, the study will reflect on how the ethnic based church system could be evaluated and resolved. Another question will be to discuss how ethnic diversity could be accommodated in the contemporary church today. The point of departure will be to point out in evaluation the systems of church government characterized in the CCAP Synods in Malawi as follows:

Hierarchical System of government

The study maintains that hierarchical system of church government characterized the CCAP Synods' structures compromising Reformed Church polity where Christ is Head and governs His Church in every detail of its life according to the principles of Scriptures. Viola (2008:156, 296) defines hierarchical system of government as one that is built on a chain -of- command social structure. Hierarchicalism is present in the highly stylized sphere of the military armed forces. Hierarchical leadership is rooted in a worldly concept of power. It is present in the vicious forms of liege/lord feudalism and master/slave relationship. Hierarchical leadership is present in the vicious forms of liege/lord feudalism and master/slave relationship (Viola 2008:156ff).

Hierarchicalism leads to abusive ethnic attitudes, behaviours and practices of manipulation. Hierarchical abuse can be the root of many serious internal church problems connected with human rights and social justice (Tarimo 2000:7f). Hierarchical government structures characterize the spirit of the Gentile

philosophy (Viola 2008:156ff). Hierarchical leadership style is undesirable to God's people in the church because it reduces human interaction into command - style relationship. Such relationships are foreign to the New Testament world of thinking and practice (Viola 2008:226). Mono-ethnic establishment or homogeneity is a strange phenomenon to the New Testament doctrine (Viola 2008:156, 296). Christ warned the disciples against the Gentile view of leadership: "It shall not be so among you!" (Mtt 20:26).

Political System of government

The study holds that the civil political system of government erroneously characterized the CCAP Synods' structures in Malawi. Zeze (2014:167) holds that Malawi's ethnic political system was the major factor that had direct influence on church polity and practice in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP). The system of church government adopted by the CCAP Synods for dividing areas of operation according to ethnicity was indeed corrupted politically motivated. In addition, the method of evangelization using particular dominant ethnic culture, practice and language for easy acceptance in various structures was also political. Historically, when one officer was in authority; he strongly hovered above the office-bearers who were considered juniors. It could be observed that a similar traditional system of autocracy existed during pre-missionary and pre-colonial relations: senior kings had a number of subordinates or tributaries who owed allegiance to them locally (Zeze 2014:167ff).

Structurally, political power and authority were vested in one person, thereby enhancing ethnic allegiance to a group of ruling class. Both the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) and the Government of Malawi adopted the highly centralized hierarchical political and administrative system developed by Colonial European masters from the 19th Century (Zeze 2014:175f). The CCAP Church, therefore copied a similar mistaken traditional system and structure of politicking in Malawi. The contemporary church must be engaged in promoting ecumenical unity according to Scriptures (Jn 17:10-18)

Ethnic System of training church- ministers

The study argues that the problem of ethnicity and ethnic divisions also find expression in the training of church- ministers. The mistaken system of terminating the training for church- ministers from the Synods of Livingstonia and Nkhoma at Ecumenical Zomba Theological College, opting for their separate institutions enhanced ethnic divisions in the CCAP Church. Candidates from other ethnic tribes apart from the Tumbuka of Northern and Chewa of Central regions respectively would not be allowed in their Synods. They would be dropped or side-lined for obvious ethnic political reasons.

However, the General Assembly of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) together with overseas partners (the Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church PCUSA) tried hard to resolve the ethnic wrangle and reconcile the two bitter Synods with no fruitful results (Minutes of General Assembly 2007). Some five centuries ago in April 1552, Calvin wrote a letter to Archbishop Cranmer on church unity saying:

Amongst the greatest evils of our century must be counted the fact that the churches are so divided one from another that there is scarcely even a human

relationship between us ... I shall not be afraid to cross ten seas for the purpose of unity if that should be necessary (Calvin 1552 in Baloyi 2010. www.reformedreflections.ca/faith-and-life/calvin-on-church-unity.html).

The Church and State connected system of government

Mistaken church and state connected system of government characterized the CCAP Synods' structures in Malawi. Nieuwenhuis (2012:153-174) holds that during the Middle Ages, in Europe, the Christian religion determined the position of the state as well as the position of the church. Religion gave state authorities and state power its legitimacy, and the government was the protector of the Christian faith. The relationship between state and religion differs from country to country. Different approaches often appear in the constitutions. Legislation and case law elaborate the relationship between state and religion in the different countries (Nieuwenhuis 2012:153-174).

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 practical Presbyterian operation including recognition of four offices in the church: pastor in mutual parity with the teacher (doctor), ruling elders, and deacons, all dully called by the church; the 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). In the church and state connected 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 a grant by the civil government.

Other churches which nurture church-state connected relations are the Church in Holland, and the Roman Catholic Church in Rome, the Lutheran Church in some parts of Germany, the Russian Orthodox and many more. However, the Presbyterian Church in America did not adhere to sections of the Westminster form of government which deals with the church-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).

Accommodation of ethnic diversity in the contemporary church

Here, the question will be to discuss how ethnic diversity could be accommodated in the contemporary church.

Attempts to achieve church unity

The question of ecumenical unity in diversity in the CCAP Church started to be discussed many decades back as early as 1890s. The unity of the church derives from its being grounded in the one God (Eph 4:1-6). Scriptures hold that the local church while indissolubly united to the whole people of God, is nonetheless a complete church (Milne 1982:211). Divine unity presupposes

ecumenical unity (Jn 17:21). God the Trinity is one God (Mtt 28:19-20, 2 Cor 13:14).

Du Plooy (1982:108) argues that the Reformed church government is based on the scriptural fact that each local church is a complete church, known as an assembly of believers. It is the responsibility of all believers in Christ to unite in the fellowship of the local church, to observe Christ's ordinances, obey the laws of God, to persevere in prayer, to keep holy the Lord's day, to meet for worship, to wait upon the preaching of the Word of God and to give generously as God prospers them for the support and extension of the Gospel and at all times seek to advance the Kingdom of God (Ex 20, Jn 20-21, Mtt 24:14, Mk 16:15). All people who truly belong to the church are one people and hence the true local church will be distinguished by its unity. Merwe in Koffeman & Smit (2014:50-51) once said:

The essential oneness belongs to the very nature of the church, and is given to the church in Christ.

In the CCAP Church, it was Rev Clement D Scott who suggested that there should be one church for British Central Africa and by 1900 the two Scottish Missionaries were beginning to explore the possibility of a United Presbyterian Church (UPC). In 1903 the Blantyre Presbytery approached Livingstonia Presbytery with the suggestion and proposed that the Creed, Constitution and Canons should be based on those of the Presbyterian Church in 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 were postponed (most of the Ministers were busy with Army chaplaincy).

Establishment of the CCAP General Synod

Weller and Linden (J. 1984:114ff) hold that 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 ecclesiastical court, although by that time the Church had not yet received its autonomy from the Church of Scotland. The Nkhoma Presbytery was reluctant to join. It only acted as an observer in the formation of the General Synod, an action which most people still question in terms of the Nkhoma Synod's seriousness in maintaining the new church's policies and decisions to this very day. Later, after further consultations with the mother body, the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, Nkhoma Synod joined the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) General Synod in October 1926 during the 50th Anniversary Celebrations of the Blantyre Mission (Weller, J. & Linden, J. 1984:114ff).

The church polity for the General Assembly was to promote the Reformed traditional unity of the body of Christ in Southern Africa. The General Assembly was committed to the ascription of historic ecumenical creeds of the Nicene, Apostles Creeds, Westminster Confession of faith, the Heidenberg Catechism,

Shorter and Larger Catechisms. Other areas of cooperation in church polity included theological education, worship and Bible translation; the Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods opted to use ethnic Chichewa as lingua franca while the Livingstonia Synod chose ethnic Tumbuka/Tonga. They also agreed on a joint hymn-book (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). The General Synod (now General Assembly) of the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) meets once every four years to 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.

Hall, D. & Hall, J. (1994:172f) argue that the marks by which the true church is known are the following: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached there in; if it maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary there to rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church. Hereby the true church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself (Hall, D. & Hall, J. 1994:172-173).

The heart of biblical Presbyterianism is the belief that sinful minds, apart from the special revelation of God, will not come up with correct structures. Hence, as an act of mercy, God gives people that which they would not contrive on their own, much as God revealed the Law (Hall, D. & Hall, J. 1994:16-17). For our own good, God has put together an organized form for settling controversies. God gave the Presbytery and the Assembly of the church to aid the local church. Thus God revealed a protective layer, an organized system of appeals to resolve issues peacefully. That is part of God's problem-solving method (Hall, D. & Hall, J. 1994:17). Human decrees and systems in church government should be fully divine in character, and the contemporary church should have a true and legitimate constitution a well-organized form of government. The main principles of the Presbyterian form of government derived from Scripture are:

The rule by a plurality of elders in the local church, the submission of the local governing body to a higher governing body, and the unity of churches finding its most concrete representation in the connection of the churches and their elders in regional and transregional bodies, sometimes called "courts" when discipline is undertaken (Hall, D. & Hall, J. 1994:5).

However, the study holds that the most fundamental secret of Reformed Church perspective must be situated in that everything should be in the field of vision of God, that God reigns supremely in all spheres, that there is no tiny area of which Christ cannot say that it is His. The basic four ground motifs at stake for Reformed tradition are: *Sola Sacra Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Fide*, *Sola Deo Gloria* (only the Word of God, only faith, only mercy, only the honour of God (Van der Walt 1983:7f). The whole of life is religion, is divine service. The church is not simply an institution; she is a "mode of existence", a way of being in communion with Christ, the community of Christ, the Head of the church, and Ruler of the community of Christ and Kingdom of God (Janssen 2000:1-2). Thus within the fellowship of the community, there is mutual subjection governed by mutual relationship, tolerance and love. Everything about the nature, plan and

people of God, as well as the very mission and polity of the church and must be revealed and understood in the context of family. Unity is essential for the whole existence of the church. The unity of the body of Christ is threatened not by diversity, but by divisions (Brooks 2002:149f). What must not exist within the body is division or schism. If the body of Christ in its essence is one, it would seem to be an obvious inference that division is impossible. The body of Christ is an indissoluble unity. Despite all the division that exists in the church of Christ, yet it is one in Christ. Schism no matter how deplorable and harmful, it is in itself cannot break down the unity that is in the body of Christ.

Paul warned the Corinthian Church to stand against ethnic affinity. It robs the church spiritually gifted men and women their potential and some of them become discouraged (Sequeira 2016:39ff). This was not to be, however, for believers are baptized by one Spirit into one body (1 Cor 12:12-13). Faith Christ transcends differences and makes all believers one. Through Christ, ethnocentrism, cultural and social barriers have been removed, as Paul indicated:

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 Corinthians 6:14-7:1).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study established that ethnic political system, clericalism and hierarchism were major factors that had direct influence on church polity and practice in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) in Malawi. The system of church government adopted by the CCAP Synods for dividing areas of operation according to ethnicity was politically motivated. Both the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) and the Government of Malawi adopted highly centralized hierarchical political and administrative system developed by Colonial European masters from the 19th Century (Zeze 2014:175f). The contemporary church, according to Reformed tradition must acknowledge the Headship of Christ over every detail of the life of the church. It is imperative that the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) recovers the compromised Reformed church polity according to Scriptures through the Holy Spirit in Reformed Church perspective for proper growth and healthy diversity. The unity of the church derives from its being grounded in the one God (Eph 4:1-6). Scriptures hold that the local church while indissolubly united to the whole people of God is nonetheless a complete church (Milne 1982:211). The justice of grace which God gives people as stipulated in an enduring church polity discourse must first be seen and done in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) for greater health and growth.

The contemporary church must positively respond to issues of ethnicity and tribalism in light of Scriptures according to Reformed church tradition. What should be transformed and eliminated are the bad attitudes, behaviours and practices of manipulation respectively. Ethnic diversity exists and ought to exist within the body of Christ. Diversity in the form of multicultural communion is a sign of people's spiritual commitment to God. The church which does not continuously reform and renew ceases to be the true church of Christ (Van der

Walt 1983:58). Walden (2015:87) holds that for churches to make progress in race and cultural relations, in many cases, they must learn to reformulate church polity which accepts people of different ethnicities, praise and worship God together. Jesus' prayer for His followers' unity in diversity must be also the model.

This article contends that structural divisions of the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) according to hierarchism and mono-ethnic lines are based on a modernistic view of church and government must be challenged and rectified in Malawi. The unity in diversity of the church derives from its being grounded in the one God (Eph 4:1-6). The Scriptural and theological basis of church unity in diversity must be accepted by all members of the church. Church unity must be achieved because of sound Scriptural and theological reasons and not because of ideological reasons. The CCAP Church must be characterized by the principle for oneness in Christ. All people who truly belong to the church are one people and hence the true local church will be distinguished by its unity. When people are unified with Christ as members of his body, they join in his priestly work of reconciling God and man. Calvin's view on unity is that the church is strictly one, hence his use of the "mother" metaphor to emphasise the unity of the church (Baloyi 2010:1-2).

Seeking greater diversity in the contemporary church is not only morally correct, but is increasingly becoming a matter of survival for many congregations. In reformed tradition, therefore, there is no control and no authoritarianism because the church as an organism is called to live by divine life, the same life that exists harmoniously within the Triune Godhead (Viola 2008:226). Reconciliation is the driving force behind church unity (2 Cor 5:18-20, Phil 2:5-12). This is how ethnic diversity could be accommodated in the contemporary church.

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